

SENSIBLE INDIVIDUATION
Umrao Sethi
Brandeis University
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There is a straightforward view of perception that has not received adequate consideration because it requires us to rethink basic assumptions about the objects of perception. In this paper, I develop a novel account of these objects—the sensible qualities—which makes room for the straightforward view. I defend two primary claims. First, I argue that qualities like color and shape are “ontologically flexible” *kinds*. That is, their real definitions allow for both physical objects and mental entities to be colored or shaped. Second, a single *instance* of these qualities can be attributed to more than one entity. Just as we attribute the same instance of a material property to a statue and to the clay that constitutes it, single instances of sensible qualities should be attributed both to the physical objects perceived and to the perceptual states that have those instances as their objects.

Too often, philosophers of mind proceed under the assumption that one can answer questions about sensory experience without addressing questions about the nature of the sensible world.¹ This paper constitutes an alternative to this overly narrow delineation of our research project. In it, I explore the metaphysical commitments of a certain, straightforward view of perceptual experience. Inchoate misapprehensions concerning the nature of sensible qualities have, I argue, blinded philosophers to the possibility of this straightforward view. Rectifying these misapprehensions clears the ground for a proper evaluation of its merits, while also serving as an illustration of the broader need to tackle the study of perception and its objects together.

The paper proceeds as follows: I begin by laying out the straightforward view of perception and highlight the account of sensible qualities that it presupposes. In the remainder of the paper, I present a series of concerns that one might have about this view of sensible qualities. I argue that these concerns can all be addressed, and in so doing, I develop a novel account of the nature of sensible qualities and the criteria by which to individuate them.

¹ In his recent book *Conscious Experience: A Logical Inquiry*, Anil Gupta considers it a central virtue of his view of experience that it leaves open the nature of the world that is presented to the subject in experience.

I. The Straightforward View

In presenting the view of perception I am calling the “Straightforward View”, I will assume the truth of two claims. The first—*Perceptual Presence*—is the claim that all sensory experiences make us aware of instances of sensible qualities like color and shape. This claim has been widely rejected in the contemporary literature on perception. For much of the second half of the twentieth century, the central dispute concerning the nature of perception has been between representationalists and qualia theorists over whether or not the character of experience outstrips its representational content. Advocates of both views reject *Perceptual Presence*. It is central to the representational approach that experiences can have the character that they do in the absence of any genuine awareness of sensible particulars. Qualia theorists, while keen to insist that pure qualitative properties must be instantiated for experiences to have character, do not identify qualia with sensible qualities like color and shape. Nor are qualia meant to be items of which a subject is aware; rather, they constitute a subject’s awareness of worldly items.

During the first half of the twentieth century, by contrast, adherents of the dominant sense-datum view standardly treated *Perceptual Presence* as indubitable. They were of the opinion that the thesis captured what was distinctive about sensory experience – that is, what distinguished it from more cognitive states like belief. Here are some representative passages by C.D. Broad and H.H. Price—two influential sense-datum theorists—demonstrating their commitment to the thesis:

Consider, e.g., the case of looking at a stick which is half in water and half in air...The most obvious analysis of the facts is that, when we judge that a straight stick *looks* bent, we are aware of an object which really *is* bent...If there be *nothing* with a kink in it before our minds at the moment, why should we think then of kinks at all, as we do when we say that the stick looks bent? No doubt we can quite well mistakenly *believe* a property to be present which is really

absent, when we are dealing with something that is only known to us indirectly, like Julius Caesar or the North Pole. But in our example, we are dealing with a concrete visible object, which is bodily present to our senses; and it is very hard to understand how we could seem to ourselves to *see* the property of bentness exhibited in a concrete instance, if in fact *nothing* was present to our minds that possessed that property (Broad, 1927, p. 241).

When I see a tomato there is much that I can doubt. I can doubt whether it is a tomato I am seeing, and not a cleverly painted piece of wax. I can doubt whether there is a material thing there at all. . . One thing however I cannot doubt: that there exists a red patch of a round and somewhat bulgy shape, standing out from a background of other colour-patches, and having a certain visual depth, and that this whole field of colour is presented to my consciousness (Price, 1932, p. 3).

The key idea here is that we are unable to explain the vivid presence of sensible qualities in sensory experiences without admitting that such experiences make us aware of instances of those qualities. When we have false beliefs about the color or shape of objects, we are not confronted with those colors and shapes in the way that we are when we hallucinate a colored or shaped object. So merely appealing to representation—a notion that is introduced to capture the way in which cognitive states like belief can be truth apt, not to explain sensory phenomenology—cannot by itself explain such vividness, which the sense-datum theorists take as a central explanandum for a view of conscious experience. Furthermore, positing an awareness of uninstantiated sensible universals—as some representationalists do²—does not help either. As Broad (1927) writes, there must be “some *object*

² See, for instance, Dretske (2003), Johnston (2004), Pautz (2007), and Tye (2014).

which really is bent” (p. 241, my emphasis). Price (1932) also makes clear that what we sense “is not redness, but a red something, an instance of redness” (p. 103). An appeal to abstract universals fails to capture the way in which sensible qualities seem present to a perceiver, in the here and now. Finally, appeals to mental properties—qualia—that are not the colors and shapes themselves also fail to capture why it is *redness* or *roundness* that seems present to my mind.³

This does not constitute a defense of *Perceptual Presence*. I have briefly sketched the motivations guiding proponents of the thesis, but for the purposes of this paper, I will assume its truth. My central concern here is what view of sensible qualities we need to accept *if* we take *Perceptual Presence* seriously (and derivatively, what view of perception this makes available to us). What must we say about the nature of redness or roundness, that is, if we insist that instances of such qualities must show up in all sensory experiences?

The second thesis, the truth of which I will also take for granted, is that physical objects have the colors and shapes that they do in a robustly mind-independent way. Whether an object is red or round does not depend on the object being perceived by beings of any kind. This thesis—call it *Mind-Independence*—receives more widespread endorsement in the contemporary literature than *Perceptual Presence*, but it does also have its detractors. As we will discover, simultaneously endorsing *Perceptual Presence* and *Mind-Independence* is almost unheard of and will require a view of sensible qualities that very few philosophers have considered.

So, let us explore the consequences of accepting these two theses. If we are to accept that all sensory experiences present the perceiver with actual instances of sensible qualities—as *Perceptual*

³ Most contemporary theorists of perception do not acknowledge the intuition behind *Perceptual Presence*. They assume, in line with Anscombe (1981) and Harman (1990), that sense-datum theorists were just blind to the representationalist alternative. But as should be clear from the passages above, sense-datum theorists are keenly aware of representational accounts of belief but argue that these fail when extended to sensory experience. Pautz (2007, 2021) and Millar (2014) are exceptions in this respect, insofar as they are representationalists who explicitly discuss the intuitive force behind *Perceptual Presence*.

Presence requires—there must be an explanation, in the case of each experience, of how such instances exist to be perceived. In ordinary perception, we have a straightforward explanation. Consider a perception of a red cardinal. There is an instance of redness there for the perceiver to be aware of because there is a red cardinal there that is causing the perceiver's experience. The presence of a red bird straightforwardly explains the existence of an instance of redness for the perceiver to be aware of. In accordance with *Mind-Independence*, we can also maintain that the cardinal instantiates redness entirely independent of the perceiver's awareness of it. Given that the cardinal is red anyway and given that the perceiver is aware of the cardinal's redness, it follows that, in such a perception, the perceiver is aware of a mind-independent instance of redness.

The explanation is less straightforward, however, in cases of delusive experience. Consider a subject who is hallucinating a red cardinal. According to *Perceptual Presence*, here too there must be an actual instance of redness for the perceiver to be aware of. The problem, however, is that we lack the kind of straightforward account of this fact that we provided in the case of ordinary perception. For in a hallucination, there is no physical object that is red and causally impacting the perceiver in the right way. How, then, could there be an instance of redness for the perceiver to be aware of?

Typically, sense-datum theorists, who accept *Perceptual Presence* across the board, argue that there exists a mind-dependent, red sense-datum that the perceiver is aware of. Unlike in the case of the red cardinal, the sense-datum is not red independent of being perceived; on the contrary, the sense-datum itself exists only insofar as the perceiver is enjoying her current experience. So the ultimate explanans of the instance of redness present in the hallucination is the state of mind that the perceiver is in. The instance of redness exists only because our hallucinating subject is in the conscious state that she is in and so it is a mind-dependent instance that she is aware of.⁴

⁴ Note the following difference in the two explanations: In the case of veridical perception, an instance of redness exists for the perceiver to be aware of because there is a cardinal present that *is* red. In the case of the hallucination, by contrast, neither the mind (nor any of its states) is itself literally red. Rather, an instance of

So far, we have suggested that a perceiver is aware of something red both when she perceives, and when she hallucinates, a red cardinal. We have offered distinct explanations for the existence of these instances of redness. In ordinary perception, a perceiver is aware of a mind-independent instance; in the hallucination, the instance is mind-dependent. This analysis is simple and compelling. It offers a unified explanation for why the character of our ordinary and delusive experiences can match—why, that is, both seem to present us with colored and shaped things—and it does so without denying us direct access to the mind-independent world in cases of veridical perception. On this *Straightforward View*, all sensory experience makes us aware of instances of sensible qualities—as *Perceptual Presence* requires—and yet, in accordance with *Mind-Independence*, physical objects instantiate the colors and shapes that they do independent of being perceived. Even though we are sometimes aware of mind-dependent instances of sensible qualities, in most ordinary contexts, it is the colors and shapes of worldly objects that we are directly acquainted with.

Despite its simplicity and pre-theoretical appeal, philosophers have not typically endorsed the *Straightforward View*. There are a couple of different reasons for this. First, many philosophers of perception have assumed that this view is ruled out by a species of “causal” arguments that purport to show that we must offer the same analysis of veridical perception as we do of hallucination.⁵ In other work (Sethi, 2020), I have argued that these causal arguments do not establish the falsity of the *Straightforward View*. In this paper, however, I am interested in exploring an alternative reason for resistance. Here, I want to explore the idea that the account of sensible qualities that the *Straightforward View* presupposes is deeply problematic.

redness exists because of the state of awareness that the subject is in. See pp. 24-26, fn. 18, and Sethi (2021a, 2021b) for an extended discussion of this point.

⁵ See, for example, Robinson (1994), Martin (2004).

II. Ontologically Flexible Kinds

The *Straightforward View* assumes that one and the same kind of quality—redness, for example—can have both mind-independent and mind-dependent instances. Let us call this the view that sensible qualities are *ontologically flexible*. One might find this claim outlandish for a number of reasons. I will consider two routes to resistance in this section. The first stems from reflections on the phenomenology of our sensory experiences. The second stems from the concern that such ontological diversity of instances, when the instances are supposedly of the same quality, is metaphysically incoherent. I will address these two sets of worries in turn.

II.1. Ontological Flexibility and Phenomenology

Classical sense-datum theorists briefly considered the *Straightforward View* and rejected it. One source of discomfort came from an ambitious view of the scope of evidence provided by our phenomenology. Here's A.J. Ayer, for instance, as reported by Austin:

When I look at a straight stick, which is refracted in water and so appears crooked, my experience is qualitatively the same as if I were looking at a stick that really was crooked... [If, however,] when our perceptions were delusive, we were always perceiving something of a different kind from what we perceived when they were veridical, we should expect our experience to be qualitatively different in the two cases. We should be able to tell from the intrinsic character of a perception whether it was a perception of a sense-datum or a material thing. But this is not possible (Austin, 1962, p. 44).

The argument structure here is interesting. Ayer argues that if veridical and delusive experiences made us aware of distinct kinds of entities—mind-independent objects in one case and mind-

dependent sense-data in the other—that difference must show up in the character of the experiences themselves. Given how different the nature of such objects would be, Ayer wonders how it could be that this kind of difference not be reflected in experience. But given that there is no difference in the phenomenology of our veridical and delusive experiences, there must not be any difference in the ontological status of the items presented.

Note that this reasoning does not, by itself, determine the actual ontological status of the items of sensory awareness. If valid, it merely establishes that each kind of experience must make us aware of entities of the same ontological status, whatever that status is. But once it is coupled with the observation that hallucinations cannot involve any mind-independent objects of awareness, it then generates the conclusion that the items presented to us must, in all instances, be mind-dependent. In other words, if there are any items of awareness at all in a hallucination—as the proponent of *Perceptual Presence* thinks there must be—we know that those items must be mind-dependent. Then, given Ayer's reasoning, it follows that the items in all sensory experiences must be mind-dependent.

To think that any difference in the ontological status of presented items can just be read off the phenomenology of our experiences surely asks too much of phenomenology. On this line of reasoning, the kinds of experiences one would expect to have if metaphysical realism were true must be distinct from the kinds of experiences one would expect if idealism were true—assuming that both views allow that the items presented in experience are correspondingly real or ideal. But why can't a mind-dependent item *seem* mind-independent? In an insightful discussion of the phenomenology of bodily sensations, Soteriou (2013) nicely emphasizes the difference between actual mind-dependence and seeming mind-dependence. As Soteriou points out, merely endorsing a view on which bodily sensations are *in fact* mind-dependent does not go very far towards explaining why bodily sensations

seem mind-dependent. For it is entirely compatible with an entity's being mind-dependent that it nonetheless *seem* mind-independent to the subject of experience.⁶

Many sense-datum theorists who are committed to the objects of sensory awareness actually being mind-dependent acknowledge that our experiences *seem* to present mind-independent entities to us.⁷ They argue for mind-dependence on theoretical, not phenomenological grounds. Now, if mind-dependent objects can *seem* mind-independent, surely, mind-independent objects can also *seem* mind-independent. (It would be quite strange to endorse the antecedent but deny the consequent.) And so, sense-datum theorists themselves need to allow for objects with different ontological status to appear the same. And so, despite Ayer's tantalizing suggestion, it cannot be the case that the sameness of the phenomenology of our veridical and delusive experiences implies sameness of ontological status of the objects of those experiences.

While our phenomenology cannot settle the actual ontological status of the items presented, it can at least take a stand on the matter. With respect to the sensible qualities like color and shape, one

⁶ See Soteriou (2013, p. 59). One way to understand Soteriou's point here is that *apparent* mind-dependence or mind-independence can be a *positive* phenomenological feature that needs explaining. Pointing to the actual ontological status of the relevant item isn't enough unless one argues for the claim that items that *are F* must *appear F*. Even though many sense-datum theorists accept a version of this principle for the sensible qualities, there is no reason for them to accept this principle for the far more theoretical property of being mind-(in)dependent.

⁷Here are some representative passages: "So strong is the prejudice for the distinct continu'd existence of the former qualities [colors, sounds, heat and cold], that when the contrary opinion is advanc'd by modern philosophers, people imagine they can almost refute it from their feeling and experience, and that their very senses contradict this philosophy" (Hume, 1738/1975, Bk. I, Part IV, Section II).

"In order to point out to the reader what sort of things I mean by sense-data, I need only ask him to look at his own right hand. If he does this he will be able to pick out something (and, unless he is seeing double, only one thing) with regard to which he will see that it is, at first sight, a natural view to take that that thing is identical, not, indeed, with his whole right hand, but with that part of its surface which he is actually seeing, but will also (on a little reflection) be able to see that it is doubtful whether it can be identical with the part of the surface of his hand in question" (Moore, 1925, p. 128).

"It is indeed an opinion strangely prevailing amongst men, that houses, mountains, rivers, and in a word all sensible objects, have an existence, natural or real, distinct from their being perceived by the understanding. But, with how great an assurance and acquiescence soever this principle may be entertained in the world, yet whoever shall find in his heart to call it in question may, if I mistake not, perceive it to involve a manifest contradiction" (Berkeley, 1710, §4).

might argue that our experiences at least *present* these qualities to us as mind-independent. Many philosophers have indeed highlighted how qualities like color *seem* mind-independent. Here are a couple of representative passages:

The phenomenology of color does not seem to be the phenomenology of properties that require a perceiver in order to be instantiated. (The phenomenology of pain is arguably different in this respect (Chalmers, 2006, p. 76).)

When we see an object and see it to have a certain color, it is, for us, as if the color were an entirely mind-independent objective quality of the object (Strawson, 1989, p. 195).

Note how these phenomenological claims extend not only to veridical perceptions but also to some full-blown hallucinations. For any hallucinations that are subjectively indistinguishable from veridical perceptions, if the latter present colors to us as mind-independent properties of objects, then the former must do so as well. When we hallucinate a red cardinal, according to the view expressed above, the redness that we experience seems to be a property of a mind-independent object, just as when we perceive a red cardinal. It's just that in a hallucination, there is no such red object there that we are actually perceiving.

Typically, this kind of phenomenological data is offered in support of the representationalist strategy, which treats hallucinations as involving inaccurate representations of mind-independent states of affairs, and in opposition to an approach on which hallucinatory episodes involve mind-dependent particulars.⁸ I have already indicated that this line reasoning only goes so far. Once we

⁸ See Harman (1990) and Tye (2002). Tye is more careful about the scope of the argument from transparency against the sense-datum theorist.

acknowledge that mind-dependent entities can seem mind-independent, we see that a sense-datum theorist is entirely able to endorse the phenomenological data described here. At best, then, the fact that colors seem mind-independent provides *prima facie* support for a view that straightforwardly endorses such phenomenological verdicts, but this support can be defeated by an explanation of how and why a property that is in fact mind-dependent can nonetheless seem mind-independent.

Rather than take on such an explanatory burden on behalf of the *Straightforward View*, I recommend that we reconsider the phenomenological data itself. We should reject the claim that colors, and sensible qualities more broadly, seem *universally* mind-independent. This rejection can be motivated in one of two ways. On the first route: Once we focus on the whole range of sensory experiences in which sensible qualities show up, it becomes clear that the view of sensible qualities that is most supported by our phenomenology is not a view on which sensible qualities are essentially mind-independent; to the contrary, our phenomenology supports a view on which sensible qualities are ontologically flexible, just as the *Straightforward View* presupposes. The second route is to resist the claim that our experiences take a stand on the ontological status of sensible qualities at all. Proponents of this route can argue that our phenomenology offers no support, defeasible or not, for one view of sensible qualities over another.

Let us begin with the first strategy. Consider the kind of phosphene experience one has when pushing down on a closed eyelid. Alternatively, consider an experience of an afterimage caused by fatigued opponent photoreceptors. In such cases, *unlike* in veridical perceptions or matching hallucinations, the subject who is having the experience can typically tell that the item she is presented with—the phosphene or the afterimage—is not a constituent of the physical world, that its existence is entirely mental, so to speak. One might even argue that this fact is apparent to the subject solely on the basis of the kind of experience she has. And despite this fact, it continues to seem to her as if the phosphene or afterimage is colored and shaped. As John Campbell writes, when describing a

phosphene experience, “it is just a denial of reality to say there is nothing there that is yellow, square and moving” (Campbell & Cassam, 2017, p. 10). When we describe a phosphene as yellow or square, we take ourselves to be ascribing the very same qualities to these mental entities that we ascribe to physical objects. Most *philosophers* deny that such ascriptions are legitimate, of course, but our ordinary linguistic behavior indicates that, at least prior to philosophical reflection, we think that these mental objects can instantiate the very same sensible features that ordinary physical objects possess.

If we assume that the yellowness of a phosphene shows up to a perceiver as mind-dependent, does that mean that the phosphene experience presents yellowness as *essentially* mind-dependent? And what of an ordinary experience of a yellow banana? In that kind of case, the phenomenological verdicts described above surely seem compelling – the yellowness of the banana seems to be a property that the banana possesses entirely independent of my perceiving it. Does this suggest that different color experiences take conflicting stands on the underlying nature of color? Do they provide incompatible pictures of what yellowness is?

To make headway on this question, it is important to distinguish two ways in which an instance of a quality can seem mind-dependent or mind-independent. First, an instance of a quality can seem mind-dependent by seeming to be an instance of a mind-dependent *kind*. Pains seem mind-dependent in this way. A pain experience presents a particular pain to the subject as belonging to a *kind* that cannot be instantiated without being experienced. When a subject experiences a toothache, for example, it is not just *that* toothache that seems to her to depend on being experienced. Rather, her experience presents toothaches, in general, as a kind of occurrence that can only take place in conscious, experiencing subjects. Our experiences of toothaches seem to settle the question of whether unconscious beings or inanimate objects could suffer from such things.

No color experiences are like toothaches. Even when I experience a yellow phosphene, I do not experience yellowness as the *kind* of property that can only be instantiated if experienced. Rather, my

experience of a yellow phosphene leaves open the possibility that bananas and lemons can also be yellow independent of being experienced by anyone. This is precisely why I describe the phosphene using exactly the same vocabulary that I use for unperceived physical objects.

Despite the fact that none of my experiences of sensible qualities present them to be essentially mind-dependent like pains, there is an alternative way in which these qualities can seem mind-dependent. The *particular* yellowness of a phosphene can seem mind-dependent because the phosphene, and thereby *its* yellowness, seem to depend, for their actual existence, on my awareness of them. Similarly, when I perceive a yellow banana, the banana seems mind-independent and so *its* yellowness seems mind-independent. In such cases, a particular instance of a quality seems mind-dependent or mind-independent, not because of the kind of quality that it is an instance of, but rather, because its particular existence seems tied to a mind-dependent or mind-independent entity.

This suggests that a specific instance of color can seem mind-dependent without impugning the ontological status of other instances of that very same color. The yellowness of a phosphene can seem mind-dependent while the yellowness of a banana seems mind-independent; neither experience takes a stand on what *all* instances of color must be like. The full range of color experiences, considered together, supports the view that color is an ontologically flexible quality, capable of being instantiated in different ontological contexts. This is precisely the picture of sensible qualities that the *Straightforward View* assumes.

At this stage, one might question the datum that the yellowness of a phosphene or an afterimage even *seems* mind-dependent. There is some striking experimental evidence that suggests that subjects can sometimes be led into believing that afterimages are real elements of the physical world, so much so that they will insist that they have lost control of their eyelids because the afterimages persist even after they have in fact closed their eyes (Swindle, 1916, p. 329). If this evidence is reliable, doesn't it

suggest that phosphenes and afterimages show up to perceivers as mind-independent and that, therefore, their colors and shapes can as well?

There are a few possible responses to this objection. First, the fact that some afterimage experiences are realistic enough to fool perceivers into thinking that they are perceiving a physical object does not imply that *all* afterimage experiences have this quality. So long as *some* experiences present us with instances of sensible qualities that seem mind-dependent, we have phenomenological support for the kind of metaphysical view underlying the *Straightforward View*.

Our opponent might argue that such experimental evidence has broader implications, though. Perhaps the fact that subjects can be made to confuse afterimage experiences for genuine perceptions suggests that, insofar as *experience* goes, afterimages and phosphenes *never* seem mind-dependent. Rather, one might argue that perceivers make post-experiential inferences about the mind-independent or mind-dependent status of these objects based on other features that they typically, though not universally, possess. Standard afterimages seem fleeting, they seem to move with a subject's head position, and they often persist when a subject closes her eyes. These features lead conscious subjects to infer that the objects in question are mind-dependent, but this is not something that can be directly read off their experiences.

While I do not think this is the right conclusion to come to about most homegrown phosphenes and after-images, I will offer a concessive reply, which transitions us to the second route to resistance outlined at the start of this section. If one is committed to the view that our experiences *never* present afterimages as mind-dependent, one must instead conclude that experience typically remains *silent* with respect to the ontological status of its objects. It seems untenable to instead insist that all afterimages positively seem mind-independent. The list of experiential features described above may not be sufficient for an item to seem mind-dependent, and so one might insist that the verdict of mind-

dependence can only be a non-experiential inference, but they surely cannot be sufficient for an item to seem specifically mind-independent either.⁹

The view that our phenomenology is silent on ontology poses no threat to the *Straightforward View*. To the contrary, it states that our phenomenology is compatible with all accounts of the nature of the sensible qualities, including, therefore, the view on which the qualities are ontologically flexible. My primary goal in this section has been to argue that the *Straightforward View* is not in conflict with our phenomenological verdicts. While I believe that our phenomenology provides positive grounds for accepting the view, this is not an essential step in the argument. I have already indicated that the *Straightforward View* can be motivated on philosophical grounds alone, stemming from simultaneously endorsing *Perceptual Presence* and *Mind-Independence*.

II.2. Is ontological flexibility (metaphysically) possible?

So far, I have considered the worry that the account of sensible qualities assumed by the *Straightforward View* is at odds with our phenomenological evidence. I argued that this worry is misplaced and that, to the contrary, our phenomenological evidence supports a metaphysics of ontological flexibility. But we still face the question of how to *make sense* of the possibility of one and the same quality having both mind-independent and mind-dependent instances. That is, even if this is the view that our phenomenology supports, is it metaphysically coherent?

Here's a natural way to express skepticism: if the yellowness of a phosphene is mind-dependent while the yellowness of a banana is mind-independent, what reason do we have to believe that these

⁹ Phillips (2013) agrees that afterimages do not appear to be material objects, that they appear to persist when our eyes are closed and that they do not exhibit constancies. Nonetheless, he argues that these appearances are compatible with afterimages being mind-independent visibilia or light phenomena. Given that Phillips' goal is to prove that afterimages do *not* provide proof of the existence of visual sensations, all that he needs to do is motivate the claim that these appearances are *compatible* with afterimages being mind-independent. He does not argue for the stronger claim that after-images *positively* seem mind-independent; doing so would require the implausible claim that the appearances are incompatible with a mind-dependent account of these entities.

are instances of the same property, *yellowness*? Doesn't the difference in ontological status just entail a difference in property?

Sense-datum theorists were, once again, skeptical of the possibility of such ontologically diverse instances. They thought it impossible that mental and physical objects could share sensible qualities. Consider the following formulation of the concern:

...the abnormal crooked sense-datum of a straight stick standing in water is qualitatively indistinguishable from a normal sense-datum of a crooked stick... is it not incredible that two entities so similar in all these qualities should really be so utterly different: that the one should be a real constituent of a material object, wholly independent of the observer's mind and organism, while the other is merely the fleeting product of his cerebral processes (Price, 1932, p. 31)?

Sense-datum theorists from the twentieth century are not alone in worrying that mental and physical objects cannot share any of their features. Berkeley (1710)—one of the main proponents of the view that only mental objects can be sensible—is famous for his insistence that “an idea can be like nothing but an idea,” (§8) thereby denying the possibility that physical and mental objects could share any qualities. The central worry here is as follows: how could two entities that are ontologically so different—one a mental sense-datum, a “fleeting product” of a subject's mind, and the other a stable, enduring physical object—nonetheless share a property like crookedness?

The question posed here is one of property identity. In order to figure out whether one and the same property, *F*, can have ontologically distinct instances, we need to know the nature of the property in question. In contemporary parlance, we need to know the real definition of the relevant property

in order to consider how and if the real definition constrains the conditions under which that property can be instantiated.¹⁰

One might try to settle the question just by thinking about the nature of properties in general. If, for instance, one is committed to a view like causal essentialism, one will insist that two instances can be instances of the same property, regardless of which property, only if they have the same causal powers. But causal essentialism is a contested metaphysical view, and it is particularly implausible for high-level properties like moral or semantic properties. Alternatively, if one accepts an extensional account of properties, one might just suggest that two instances are instances of the same property only if they are members of the same set. But this presupposes that we have a criterion for membership in the relevant set and that is precisely what is in question here. If we are trying to figure out whether the yellowness of a sense-datum and the yellowness of a banana are both instances of yellow, we cannot just presume an answer to the question of whether the banana and the sense-datum belong to the relevant set or not.

Rather than come up with a general account of property identity, it seems far more suitable for our purposes to work through particular cases. We can consider some familiar properties to see if we can find any uncontentious examples of the kind of ontological flexibility under investigation here. If we do find such examples, we can then see if there is any reason to rule out this kind of flexibility in the case of the sensible qualities in particular.

Let us begin with the example of pain. Most people agree that pains can only exist if they are felt. Furthermore, we believe that this is not merely a contingent fact about pain; it is part of the very nature of pain that it cannot exist unless there is someone feeling the pain. What we have here, then,

¹⁰ See Audi (2016) for a nice overview of different accounts of property identity. A real definition can be thought of as a metaphysical counterpart of a linguistic definition. It tells us what a thing essentially is. The *definiendum* is a worldly entity (redness, justice) and the *definiens* is composed of other worldly entities. See Rosen (2015) for a detailed discussion of the notion.

is an example of how the real definition of pain imposes rather strict constraints on how it can be instantiated. To put it plainly, pain, by its nature, is a property that can only have mind-dependent instances. Its real definition either identifies pain with, or grounds it in, a feeling. And so pain does not have much ontological flexibility.

On the side of material properties, consider a property like weighing two pounds. What it is for an object to weigh two pounds is for that object to have two pounds of gravitational force acting on it. Given that only entities that have mass can be subject to gravitational forces in this way, we can conclude that only entities that have mass can have weight. So, once again, the real definition of the property *weighing two pounds* places somewhat restrictive ontological constraints on the kinds of entities that can instantiate the property. Massless entities like light waves cannot weigh two pounds, nor can abstract objects like stories, nor events like a dance performance (even though the material constituents of an event, or a particular book that tells a story, may weigh two pounds).

Functional properties, by contrast, are good candidates for ontological flexibility because they are defined in terms of what their bearers can *do*, as opposed to what their bearers are intrinsically like. Any entity that can perform the relevant function can, in principle, instantiate the relevant property. Take, for example, the property of *being legal tender*. The real definition of this property leaves open that pieces of paper, verbal promises, bars of gold and digital processes can serve as legal tender because all that it is for something to be legal tender is for it to be treated as such by the right people and the right institutions. Temporal properties are likewise instantiated by all kinds of entities. My dog, my back ache and the construction next door all have the property of existing for more than six months. Aesthetic properties are extremely ontologically flexible. Physical objects (paintings, sculptures), mental entities (minds and their ideas), events (dances, plays), and abstract objects (stories, mathematical proofs) can all be beautiful. Any good candidate for a real definition of beauty must make room for such radical ontological flexibility.

Despite initial puzzlement, then, ontological flexibility is rather commonplace and comes in degrees. The degree of flexibility that a property has is typically determined by the property's real definition. Once we know the real definition of a property, we can determine what kinds of entities can instantiate that property.

The next question to ask is whether sensible qualities *in particular* can be ontologically flexible. As I have already indicated, our pre-theoretical verdicts point towards a substantial degree of flexibility. Think about the range of objects we ascribe chromatic properties to – material objects, lights, shadows, rainbows, phosphenes, afterimages and full-blown hallucinatory objects. Philosophers have, of course, put forth a variety of accounts of the nature of color on which we must retract many of these ascriptions. If one endorses a view on which colors are spectral reflectance profiles, one will deny that phosphenes, afterimages or lights can be colored.¹¹ A proponent of such a view will need to offer some account of why such objects seem colored if they cannot be so and why ascribing color to these entities seems so natural. On the other end of the spectrum, someone who argues that colors are properties of experiences must conclude, at a minimum, that when I say that the tomato is red, I either say something false or assert something that is more complex than the surface structure of my assertion indicates.

If, in contrast to these revisionary approaches, we take our pre-theoretical verdicts at face-value, they provide *prima facie* evidence for the ontological flexibility of colors. They provide support for a view on which colors can be instantiated in a fairly wide range of ontological contexts. The same goes for shape. We ascribe shapes to physical objects, regions of space, abstract geometrical figures, phosphenes, afterimages, and full-blown hallucinatory objects. These judgments support a view of shape properties that treats them as having ontologically flexible natures. Coupled with the conclusion

¹¹ Cf. Phillips (2013).

that there is nothing incoherent about the notion of ontological flexibility, why not endorse this *prima facie* evidence and accept that sensible qualities are themselves ontologically flexible?

One might wonder whether any real definition of sensible qualities like color and shape could allow for the kind of flexibility indicated by our pre-theoretical judgments. I cannot offer a complete analysis of the nature of all sensible qualities here. But for the case of color, for instance, a simple view which defines colors in terms of how they *look* would allow for a variety of entities to be colored. It may restrict colors to objects that are, at least in principle, perceivable, but this would nonetheless leave open entities as diverse as physical objects, lights, rainbows, as well as a full host of mental objects like phosphenes and afterimages. Likewise, if shape properties are defined in geometrical or mathematical terms, this would also leave open the theoretical possibility that physical objects, regions of space and abstract objects could all be shaped. Finally, one could even commit to a certain degree of causal essentialism regarding the sensible qualities so long as the causal roles that were *essential* to the sensible qualities had to do with their impacts on perceivers. While a yellow phosphene cannot be painted black with a paintbrush, and a hallucinated sphere cannot roll down a hill, these entities can nonetheless have the same effects as their physical counterparts on conscious subjects who perceive or think about them. A yellow phosphene can cause a subject to exclaim “that’s yellow” in much the same way as a yellow banana. A striking yellow afterimage may even confuse a bee into acting as if it has found a pollen-laden sunflower. A hallucinated sphere will cause a child to extend her arm as if reaching for a real ball.

Let me recap where we have reached. My goal in this section was not to provide a complete real definition for each of the sensible qualities. Instead, I have offered an account of what it is for a property to be ontologically flexible. I have argued that a property is ontologically flexible just in case the nature of the property—its real definition—allows for a diverse range of entities to instantiate the property. I have also indicated that ontological flexibility comes in degrees and that the degree of

flexibility that a property has can typically be read off its real definition. Some properties have rather restrictive natures such as experiential properties like pain or physical properties like weight or mass. Other properties are more ontologically flexible. Aesthetic properties, for instance, have extremely flexible natures. Sensible qualities, I suggest, fall somewhere in between these two extremes. At a minimum, their natures are such that they allow for the qualities to be instantiated by both physical and mental entities. When the entities in question are mental—phosphenes, afterimages or hallucinatory objects—the instances of sensible qualities are mind-dependent. They exist only insofar as they are being experienced. When, in contrast, sensible qualities are instantiated by physical objects like cardinals or tomatoes, the resulting instances are mind-independent. Lastly, definitions of sensible qualities in terms of how they look, their structural features, or their causal impact on perceivers are entirely compatible with their being ontologically flexible.

III. Individuating Instances of Sensible Qualities

So far, we have focused on how to individuate property kinds. I have argued that instances with distinct ontological status can nonetheless be instances of the same property so long as the property in question has a flexible nature that leaves open the relevant kind of ontological diversity.

Let's return to the *Straightforward View*. On this view, when a subject hallucinates, she is aware of actual instances of sensible qualities. I have suggested that the only way to make sense of this is to insist that the subject's mental state is itself responsible for the instantiation of the relevant qualities and that the instances in question are, therefore, mind-dependent. In contrast, when a subject is perceiving, she is aware of mind-independent instances whose existence is explained by the presence of a physical object that bears the relevant qualities. These are two distinct conditions under which a sensible quality can be instantiated. A further question now arises: can both of these explanatory conditions simultaneously obtain, and, if they do, how many instances of the sensible quality result?

There is good reason to think that both conditions can indeed obtain at the same time. Consider a “causally matching hallucination” of a red cardinal – that is, a hallucination that is brought about by replicating the total neural state that a subject is in when she perceives a red cardinal, in the absence of any such physical object. Given our commitment to *Perceptual Presence*, we must conclude that in such an experience, the subject is aware of an instance of redness. The *Straightforward View* explains this by suggesting that the instance present in the hallucination has its existence guaranteed by the subject’s internal state. But given that the subject is in the very same total internal state when she is perceiving a red cardinal, we now must concede that in cases of veridical perception, as well, the subject’s internal state can guarantee the instantiation of redness.¹² Given *Mind-Independence*, however, we know that the presence of the red cardinal also guarantees the existence of an instance of redness. So here we have a case where there are two conditions, each of which seems apt to explain why there is an instance of redness there to be perceived, both of which simultaneously obtain.

In this kind of case, the fact that redness is instantiated is over-determined. Even if the physical object were absent, redness would still be instantiated in virtue of the subject’s internal state – in such circumstances, she would suffer a hallucination of a red cardinal. Similarly, even if the subject weren’t present or had her eyes closed, then too, redness would be instantiated just in virtue of the presence of the red cardinal. But, at the level of particular instances, there seem to be two possible ways to explain such over-determination. One might think that the instantiation of redness is over-determined because there are *two distinct instances* of the quality – one supported by the physical object, the other by the mind of the perceiving subject. Alternatively, one might think that there is a *single instance* of redness, the existence of which is itself over-determined. On this latter picture, the mind and the physical object secure the existence of the very same instance of redness.

¹² See Sethi (2020) for a detailed presentation of this style of argument.

Note that the latter approach is fully compatible with the *Straightforward View*. All sensory experiences make us aware of instances of sensible qualities, in accordance with *Perceptual Presence*. Perhaps surprisingly, *Mind-Independence* is upheld as well: Even though my mind guarantees the existence of the perceived instance of redness, given that this instance *also* has its existence supported by the physical bird, it continues to exist beyond the duration of the perceiver’s awareness, just so long as the bird exists and remains red. And so, perceived instances of sensible qualities, though over-determined, are robustly mind-independent.

In other work (Sethi, 2020, 2021b), I have argued that this latter approach allows us to uphold a compelling account of perception. But, my focus here, again, is on the account of sensible qualities that it presupposes. The question we now must address has to do with the nature of sensible *instances*. That is, how is it even possible for two distinct entities—my mental state and a physical object—to support a single instance of F-ness? Ever since Aristotle, we have presumed that instances—“accidents” in older parlance—are ontologically dependent entities wholly individuated by their ontological bases. If *a*’s F-ness is individuated by *a*, *b*’s F-ness individuated by *b*, how can *a*’s F-ness be identical to *b*’s F-ness, unless *a* is identical to *b*? In the remainder of this paper, I will argue that considerations entirely independent of any puzzles about perception demonstrate the need for a metaphysics that makes room for the sharing of instances by distinct entities. Entities that are distinct but ontologically related to each other must be able to share instances of those properties that follow from the ontological relation that connects them. The strategy I deploy will be similar to that adopted in the previous section: I will point to familiar examples that reveal that a sharing of instances by distinct entities is indeed possible and then argue that there is no reason to think that such sharing is ruled out in the case of sensory perception in particular. And so once again, the metaphysical framework described above is on strong footing and the *Straightforward View* worthy of genuine consideration.

III.1. Simple Individuation

The traditional substance-accident framework that traces back to Aristotle tells us that substances are ontologically independent entities. Their existence does not need any metaphysical explanation. Accidents, on the other hand, or instances of properties in contemporary parlance, are entities that ontologically depend on substances. Their existence is to be explained by the particular substances that they depend on.

We do not need to embrace all of the commitments of the traditional substance-accident framework. A key idea that remains widely accepted, though, is that we ought to individuate instances of a property by the ontologically prior entities that explain their existence. We do not have to think of these entities themselves as substances, with all the thick commitments that come with the traditional view. Often the entities that explain the existence of a property-instance may themselves be ontologically dependent on other entities. But so long as they are ontologically prior to the instances themselves, we can rely on them to individuate the instances they support.

Here's the simple principle that results:

Simple Individuation: The instance of F-ness with respect to x = the instance of F-ness with respect to y only if $x = y$, where x and y are ontologically prior to their instances.¹³

Why not formulate this criterion more simply as “ x 's F-ness = y 's F-ness only if $x = y$ ”? To understand why we need the more circuitous formulation, we need to briefly consider the different *ways* in which

¹³ Note that I have merely stated necessary—not sufficient—conditions for instance identity. If a red object is painted yellow and then painted red again, we may wonder whether the object's redness prior to the painting is distinct from the object's redness after the painting. If we conclude that these are distinct instances, we may need to specify further conditions having to do with spatiotemporal continuity. These further specifications aren't relevant for our purposes because I will go on to argue that even this minimal necessity claim turns out to be false.

entities can explain the existence of instances. First consider the simple case of physical objects – a cardinal guarantees the instantiation of redness in virtue of redness *inhering in* the cardinal. Inherence is the traditional metaphysical relationship that an accident is thought to stand in to its substantial bearer, i.e., the substance that explains its existence. When a quality inheres in a substance, we can predicate the quality of that substance.

But the model of inherence cannot be applied to the mental case. In the paper so far, I have repeatedly suggested that the mind can secure the instantiation of redness. But how does it do this? Surely redness is not instantiated in virtue of the quality inhering in the mind – neither my mind nor any of its states are themselves literally red when I hallucinate a red cardinal. Furthermore, even though we often speak of a phosphene, a sense-datum, or a hallucinated cardinal as red, this is just a linguistic convenience. Phosphenes, sense-data and hallucinatory objects are nothing more than collections of sensible instances, and are not, therefore, ontologically prior to those instances (and cannot, therefore, be relied on to ground the instances in question). In order to explain how instances of qualities can exist in delusive experiences that lack any physical objects of awareness—as *Perceptual Presence* requires—we must acknowledge that mind-dependent instances can depend, for their existence, on the minds that perceive them, without inhering in those minds. The redness I am aware of when I hallucinate a red cardinal exists only insofar as I am in the state of awareness that I am in. We can conclude, then, that its existence is guaranteed by being the object of that state of awareness. The redness exists because I perceive it, but it inheres in *nothing*.¹⁴

To recap: when *Simple Individuation* refers to an instance of F-ness “with respect to x ”, where x is ontologically prior to the instance, the relation that x stands in to the instance of F-ness can either be

¹⁴ While a hallucinated instance inheres in nothing because its existence is *solely* guaranteed by a mind’s awareness of it, a purportedly “over-determined” instance would have a bearer. For its existence would be guaranteed both by being the object of a mind’s awareness and by inhering in a material object. See Sethi (2021a, 2021b) for a much more detailed discussion and defense of these points.

the standard relation of inherence or the relation of awareness just outlined. Sensible qualities inhere in physical objects and they are the objects of a mind's awareness. According to *Simple Individuation*, an instance of a sensible quality can be individuated either by appeal to the physical object it inheres in or by appeal to the mental state of which it is the object.

According to *Simple Individuation*, if the ontological supports for two instances are distinct, the instances themselves must be distinct. For example, the redness of one cardinal cannot be identical to the redness of a second cardinal, simply because the two cardinals are themselves numerically distinct (even if they are qualitatively identical). This simple criterion seems to issue the right verdicts for a variety of cases involving perceptual experience. It predicts that the redness that Aleeya hallucinates cannot be identical to the redness that Amaaya hallucinates because the former instance has its existence explained by Aleeya's mind while the latter is explained by Amaaya's. Given that their minds (or their relevant states) are distinct, the instances that they hallucinate must also be distinct. This seems like the right verdict. We do not think that two entirely independent subjects can latch onto a single hallucinatory object, even if they happen to enjoy qualitatively identical hallucinations. The objects of hallucinatory experiences are, we assume, private in this respect.

Simple Individuation also predicts that when Aleeya veridically hallucinates a red cardinal—that is, when she has a hallucinatory experience that just happens to coincide with how the world is—the instance that Aleeya is aware of is *not* the cardinal's redness. The criterion predicts this because the hallucinated instance is explained by Aleeya's mind while the redness of the bird is explained by appeal to the bird, and Aleeya's mind and the bird are themselves distinct. This too seems like the right verdict. There is no sense in which Aleeya is perceptually aware of the bird's redness. It played no causal role in bringing about her experience; her experience can continue to exist even in the absence of the bird. While she is aware of an instance of the same kind, there are, nonetheless, two distinct

instances here: one unperceived instance that depends on the bird and one experienced instance that depends on her mind.

So far so good. What does *Simple Individuation* predict for the crucial case in which Aleeya veridically perceives a red cardinal? In that case, the presence of the cardinal guarantees the instantiation of redness. But Aleeya's internal state also guarantees the instantiation of redness. In this case, *Simple Individuation* seems to plainly suggest, just like in the case of veridical hallucination, that we have two distinct instances here. There is an instance of redness that has its existence explained by the cardinal, and an instance of redness that has its existence explained by Aleeya's mind, and insofar as neither Aleeya's mind, nor any of its states, are identical to the physical bird, these must be distinct instances.

If *Simple Individuation* is right, we cannot make sense of there being a single instance in the case of veridical perception. In the remainder of this paper, I will argue that *Simple Individuation* must be modified. Crucially, I will suggest that we must re-evaluate the proposed criterion for reasons unrelated to debates about perceptual experience, on the grounds that it generates extremely implausible verdicts in a range of cases in which we have distinct, *but intimately connected*, entities.

III.2. The Statue and the Clay

Consider a statue of Nataraja—the incarnation of the Hindu god Shiva in the form of the divine cosmic dancer—and the clay of which such a statue is composed. There are familiar reasons for thinking that the statue and the clay must be distinct objects. Crucially, they seem to have a set of incompatible properties. If the statue is remolded such that it no longer depicts the specific dance pose that Nataraja adopts, it is no longer a statue of Nataraja even though it is the same lump of clay. On the other hand, the lump of clay has its quantity essentially, while the statue of Nataraja can survive a small change in quantity. There are other differences in properties as well: the statue can come into and go out of existence at different times than the clay; the statue of Nataraja may be immensely

valuable while the clay is worthless. By Leibniz's law of the indiscernibility of identicals, it follows that the statue is not identical to the clay. On the standard view, we have two distinct, though closely related objects. The statue is materially constituted by the clay, but constitution is *not* identity.¹⁵

If we assume that the statue and the clay are distinct, *Simple Individuation* predicts that their property-instances must also be distinct. This implies that Nataraja's blueness is distinct from the clay's blueness. This is a surprising verdict. Our intuition is that the statue's color *just is* the clay's color. The same holds for many of the statue's material properties. Its shape and size also seem to just be identical to the clay's shape and size. Levinson (1980) expresses this thought nicely in the following passage:

In short, when two objects are connected by certain near-identity relations (e.g. is composed of, is embodied in) it seems they do not possess distinct quality-bits of certain qualities had by both, but instead share a single bit between them. Why is this so? I think our intuitions concerning the non-distinctness of the quality-bits in these cases may rest on some underlying principle to the effect that objects which have all the same matter in common do not possess distinct quality-bits of qualities they possess in common which depend on or proceed from material composition. The idea is that, for a matter-bound quality, F-ness, if there is no difference in matter between the two objects, then we have difficulty conceiving of a distinct F-ness for each (p. 115).

Putting aside the unusual terminology of quality-bits, which is just how Levinson characterizes instances of qualities, the thought is that distinct but intimately related objects can share a single instance of some qualities. In particular, when one object is materially composed of another, the two

¹⁵ For proponents of the view that constitution is not identity, see Wiggins (1968), Johnston (1992), Thomson (1998), Fine (2003), Koslicki (2004).

objects can share instances of those properties that “depend on or proceed from material composition.”

In the quoted passage, Levinson describes our “intuitions” about the sharing of instances. But one might wonder what role intuition has to play here. One would be entitled to point out that we have already left the realm of intuition behind once we conclude that the statue and the clay are distinct, though co-located objects. Once we have acknowledged the counter-intuitive non-identity of the objects, why not just accept the verdict that their property instances are similarly not identical? Who has intuitions about instances in the first place?¹⁶

I think this would be the wrong conclusion to come to. Even if one is not moved by intuitions about property individuation, there are several good philosophical reasons to argue that intimately related objects must share instances of properties. First, one of the main objections to anti-reductionist views of constitution stems from the implausible implication of property doubling. As Lewis (1986) famously complains: “It reeks of double counting to say that here we have a dishpan, and we also have a dishpan-shaped bit of plastic that is just where the dishpan is, weighs just what the dishpan weighs (why don’t the two together weigh twice as much?), and so on” (p. 252). While anti-reductionists may come up with arcane ways to avoid the claim that the distinct instances of weight can be added together, the objection is simple and powerful. If the statue weighs sixty pounds and the clay that it is composed of weighs sixty pounds, and if the statue’s weight is not identical to the clay’s weight, why don’t we have a total weight of a hundred and twenty pounds? Insisting that the non-identity of objects does not entail the non-identity of all of their property-instances gives us the resources to avoid this style of objection entirely.

¹⁶ Thanks to Dominic Alford-Duguid for giving voice to such skepticism in conversation.

Non-reductionists about material constitution also face worries about rampant causal over-determination that can be avoided by a view which allows distinct objects to share property instances. Here's Paul (2007) describing the problem:

Imagine that I hit a tennis ball and it bounces off my racquet at a speed of 100 miles per hour. What causes this effect? Well, I do...But even though I cause the bouncing of the tennis ball, I am constituted by a sum of cells and other matter, and this sum causes the bouncing as well. In fact, according to the non-reductionist, there are many different objects causing the bouncing (p. 269).

If we accept the widely held view that causal relations are relations between property-instances, and if we assume that the anti-reductionist must conclude that the constituted and the constituting entities don't share any property-instances, we must accept rampant causal over-determination in the world of ordinary objects.¹⁷ If, on the other hand, we insist, as philosophers like Paul and others recommend, that two distinct entities can share some of their instances, we are able to rule out such over-determination. If we conclude that I and the sum of cells that compose me are distinct but "not entirely distinct—and a common part of the objects...is what does the causing" (Paul, 2007, p, 282), then we can continue to hold that material constitution is not identity without embracing widespread causal over-determination.

So, there are good reasons, entirely independent of debates about perceptual experiences, to think that *Simple Individuation* is *too* simple. It does not take into consideration the possibility that objects that

¹⁷ One might think we can avoid the charge of over-determination by limiting causal relations to entities at the same "level". The problem with this strategy is that we do not think that macroscopic objects can only have causal influence on other macroscopic objects and that sums of cells can causally influence only other sums. See Paul (2007) for a further critique of this proposal.

are not identical but intimately related may share some of their property instances because of the nature of the ontological relation that they stand in. Material constitution is one such clear example: when one object is materially constituted by another, it shares its material nature with the object it is constituted by and so the constituted and constituting objects share a single set of material instances. If we can make sense of distinct objects literally sharing some of their features, we need a revised criterion of individuation:

Revised Individuation: The instance of F-ness with respect to x = the instance of F-ness with respect to y only if x and y stand in the right kind of ontological relation, where x and y are ontologically prior to their instances.

Revised Individuation, as formulated here, is not fully precise. To apply the revised criterion to specific cases, we must get clearer on what the “right kind” of ontological relation is for a given property, F. It is unlikely that we can give an entirely general account here. It is obvious, for example, that identity is a relation that trivially entails the sharing of instances for any candidate property, F. We have now also seen that material constitution is the kind of relation that allows for the sharing of instances of material properties like color, shape and size. There is no reason to assume that other ontological relations could not also support the sharing of relevant property instances. In the final section of this paper, I gesture at some reasons to think that our minds stand in the kind of ontological relation to the world that allows for the sharing of instances of *sensible qualities* in particular.

III.3. Returning to Perception

Given our commitment to *Perceptual Presence*, the argument outlined in III.1 showed that a subject’s internal state, in the case of both ordinary perception and hallucination, must guarantee the

instantiation of redness. That reasoning showed us, perhaps surprisingly, that sensory states are always sufficient for the instances that serve as their objects. But our commitment to *Mind-Independence* required us to hold that the presence of the cardinal also guarantees the instantiation of redness regardless of whether anyone is perceiving it. The question we were left with, then, was whether we could conclude that the subject's internal state guarantees the existence of the *very same* instance that is supported by the physical bird.

Simple Individuation ruled this possibility out, but we have now seen that this criterion is overly simple. It issues the wrong verdict for a host of cases in which two distinct entities stand in certain kinds of ontological relation to each other. In such cases, the most plausible verdict, for a relevant set of shared properties, is that the two entities share instances of those qualities. If we take the discussion of material constitution above to establish the possibility that two entities can support a single instance, then we have already made room for the possibility that a physical object and a perceiver's mind can support one and the same instance of redness.¹⁸

All that remains is to show that there is a relevant ontological relation that my mind stands in to the physical object in the world, and that the ontological relation in question is of the kind that can support the sharing of instances of sensible qualities in particular. The remarks that follow are somewhat speculative and open-ended.

¹⁸ If *inherence* in an object were the only way for a property to be instantiated, one could argue that there must be two instances in the perceptual case without appealing to *Simple Individuation*. If the redness that the mind secured had to inhere in the mind, and the redness that the cardinal secured had to inhere in the cardinal, how could there be only a single instance of redness present given that the two bearers—the cardinal and the mind—are in entirely different spatial locations? Even if universals can be multiply located, surely a single *instance* of a universal cannot be – this is precisely the difference between universals and particulars. Once we realize, however, that the mind secures the instantiation of redness, not in virtue of being its bearer, but rather in virtue of perceiving redness, it is entirely possible for the very redness that the mind supports to be located in the physical world, right where the cardinal is located. See (Sethi, 2021b) for more on this virtue of an awareness-based account of mind-dependence.

Start by considering the following series of sensory experiences. First, Aleeya perceives a particular red cardinal, C. It is essential to her perceptual state being a veridical perception of C that it stand in the right kind of relation to C. Typically, it is assumed that this relation must, at a minimum, include the bird causing Aleeya's state in the right way. Now, imagine that C is replaced by an indistinguishable bird, C*, without Aleeya noticing any change in her experience. Her perceptual state can no longer amount to a perception of C because C is no longer involved in bringing about her experience. Rather, Aleeya's state now constitutes a perception of C*. Finally, imagine that both cardinals have flown away but a neuroscientist intervenes and starts directly stimulating her brain in such a way that she still does not notice any change—that is, she continues to be in a state that she cannot distinguish from her prior sensory states. Now, we must conclude that the state that Aleeya is in does not constitute either a perception of C or of C*. Rather, she is in a sensory state that has no particular physical bird as its object and is, instead, a hallucination as of a red cardinal.

There is significant disagreement in the literature about whether the subjective indistinguishability of these three scenarios entails a difference in the kind of *experience* enjoyed.¹⁹ But regardless of one's position on the question of categorizing experiential kinds, one can nonetheless agree that the sensory states described above are different *particulars*. Our criteria for individuating kinds of experiences can come apart from our criteria for how to individuate *particular* perceptions or hallucinations. The former set of criteria may be insensitive to which particulars are at the end of the causal chain, but the latter need not be. Consider, for instance the following passage from Burge (2005):

If a person looks at a scene, and an object in it is exchanged with a contextually indiscernible object, the first and then the second object is seen—even though the individual is unaware of

¹⁹ Traditionally, it was assumed that subjectively indistinguishable experiences must be phenomenally identical. But disjunctivists about experience have rejected this inference and argued that our powers of introspection may be systematically limited. See, for example, Martin (2006) and Logue (2012).

a difference. Different things are seen and different perceptions or perceptual beliefs occur (p. 32).

Crucially, Burge's thought here is that the perceptual states themselves are distinct in virtue of being perceptions of different objects even if that difference in object is not detectable by the subject. Regardless of how we individuate experiential kinds, then, the proposal under consideration is that perceptual states, in general, are dependent for their existence, *qua perceptions*, on being caused by physical objects in the world in the right way, and that *particular* perceptual states depend, for their existence, on the *particular* physical objects that cause them. A change in which object is at the end of the causal chain results in a change in the resulting perceptual state. The particular perception that a perceiver enjoys when she *sees* the cardinal cannot persist when the causal connection to the bird is severed, even if the causal impact of the bird is replicated by a different bird or by direct neural stimulation.

If this is right, our perceptual states are not only caused by physical objects, they ontologically depend on those physical objects.²⁰ Of course the relation is not one of material constitution as in the case of the statue and the clay. But we have no reason to assume that material constitution is the only relation that allows for the sharing of instances. The important takeaway from our discussion of the statue and the clay is that *Simple Individuation* can fail when there is an ontological relationship between the relevant ontological bases. We have now seen that there *is* such an ontological relationship between perceptual states and their worldly causes. And thus it is possible for a sharing of instances to occur in the case of perception.

²⁰ If one is a representationalist or qualia theorist about experience, one can just identify sensory or perceptual states with experiences. But those of us who are committed to *Perceptual Presence* cannot accept this identity claim. Sensory states of perceivers are not identical to experiences, they are constituents of experiences which are relations between such states of a perceiver and perceived items.

At this stage, one might wonder the following: if material constitution allows for the sharing of *material* instances, which property-instances might be shared by our minds and their worldly causes? In Levinson's words, which properties "depend on or proceed from" the perceptual relation?

Here is a speculative proposal: We know by now that *all* sensory states must have sensible objects. We have seen how this implies that *all* sensory states must guarantee the existence of the instances that serve as those objects. In this section, I have introduced the further thought that *perceptual* states in particular are essentially caused by the sensible objects that serve as *their* objects. If a state having a particular sensible instance as its object implies that the state in question is sufficient for that instance, and if a perceptual state can only have a sensible instance as its object if it is caused by that sensible instance, then the only way we can satisfy these two conditions simultaneously is to insist that there is a sharing of instances between the perceptual state and the sensible object that causes it to come about. This implies the following hypothesis for when the sharing of instances must occur: there will be a single shared instance of a quality, *F* in those cases in which a sensory state is caused by an instance of *F*-ness *and* has an instance of *F*-ness as its object.

Here is the (rough) analogy to the case of the statue and the clay. Just as a statue can instantiate redness only in virtue of being constituted of a piece of clay that instantiates redness, a *perceptual* state can be directed at (or, equivalently for our purposes, have as its object) an instance of redness only in virtue of being caused by a worldly object that instantiates redness. And so, just as the statue shares, with the clay, a single instance of redness, a perceptual state shares with its worldly cause, a single instance of redness. While the statue and the clay share instances of those qualities relevant to the statue's material nature, a perceptual state shares, with the physical object, instances of those properties relevant to its *sensible* nature – that is, instances of the *sensible* qualities.

There are several ways in which these conditions can fail to be met, and in all such cases of failure, we do not get a sharing of instances. There will be cases of failure that imply that the resulting state is

not a genuine perception. If Aleeya has an experience of orange but this experience is caused by a red object, then even though she is in causal contact with the object, her experience is directed at orangeness without being caused by orangeness. Similarly, in a veridical hallucination, if Aleeya has an experience of redness, and there is a red bird in her environment, there is no sharing of instances because, once again, her hallucinatory state has redness as its object without being caused by redness.²¹

There can also be cases in which a perceptual state *is* *F* and is caused by a physical object's *F*-ness, but where the perceptual state does not constitute a perception *of* *F*-ness. For example, imagine a cardinal that happens to pop into existence just as Aleeya looks out the window and two minutes later, is obliterated. On its obliteration, Aleeya's perceptual state will also cease to exist and so both the cardinal and the perceptual state have the property of lasting for exactly two minutes. The time that the cardinal exists is causally relevant to the coming about and going out of existence of Aleeya's perceptual state. Nonetheless, we lack a single instance of the temporal property here so long as Aleeya's perceptual state does not constitute a perception *of* that temporal property.

IV. Conclusion

The *Straightforward View* has it that all sensory experience makes us aware of instances of sensory qualities. Veridical perceptions acquaint us with mind-independent instances while hallucinations make us aware of mind-dependent instances of the very same qualities. In this paper, I considered two categories of objection that one may have to the *Straightforward View*, both of which stem from concerns about the account of sensible qualities that the view presupposes. The first concern has to

²¹ The causal relation has to, of course, be non-deviant. A neuroscientist may use an electrode of a certain cylindrical shape in order to induce in Aleeya a hallucination of a cylindrical shape. The cylindrical shape of the electrode may even be causally relevant to bringing about the hallucination—perhaps the cylindrical shape plays a role in the transmission of the electric current—but insofar as the causal process is non-standard and is not that which occurs when an object's shape causes an experience of that shape, the sensory state that it brings about is not a sensory state that can be directed at the electrode's cylindricity. And so, again, we don't have a single, perceived, instance of cylindricity.

do with whether it is possible for one and the same kind of property to have ontologically diverse instances. I argued that it is indeed possible and that the nature of a property determines the conditions under which that property can be instantiated. Properties have natures that are ontologically “flexible” to varying degrees. Our pre-theoretical observations about the sensible qualities lend credence to the view that their natures are substantially flexible. We ascribe color and shape properties to a wide variety of entities, including entities that we know exist only insofar as we perceive them. A view that respects these pre-theoretical verdicts is to be preferred so long as it is metaphysically coherent.

This first objection has to do with property *kinds*; the second objection concerns the nature of property *instances*. Once we recognize that a subject’s sensory state, even when she is perceiving, is sufficient for the instantiation of sensible qualities, one might worry that a perceiver cannot actually perceive the qualities of mind-independent objects. The worry arises out of a simple criterion of individuation, according to which a difference in property base implies a difference in instances.

In response to this objection, I argued that the simple criterion of individuation is false. While it is typically the case that distinct ontological bases imply distinct instances, we must allow for exceptions to this rule in cases where the two bases are themselves ontologically related to each other. I first demonstrated the need for such an exception in the case of material constitution. When one object is materially constituted by another, even though the constituting object and the constituted object are distinct, they nonetheless share instances of their material properties.

In the case of perception, the relation between a sensory state and its object is obviously not one of material constitution, but, I argued, sensory states must be individuated by their sensible objects, which in the case of veridical perceptions, just are their physical causes. I suggested we get a sharing of instances only when a sensory state is both directed at and caused by the same sensible quality.

And so the *Straightforward View* can be upheld; the metaphysical framework that it presupposes is fully coherent, and it can be independently motivated. Whether the *Straightforward View* is the best view

of perception is a further question, one that has not been the focus of this paper. Given the joint commitment to *Perceptual Presence* and *Mind-Independence*, it amounts to a version of naïve realism that makes room for hallucinations to have the same phenomenology as our ordinary perceptions, without denying that perception involves unmediated access to the mind-independent world. The view has many of the benefits of standard naïve realism without the costs of the disjunctivism that naïve realism is typically thought to entail. Mounting a full defense of the *Straightforward View*, however, is a task that must be left to other work.²²

²² Versions of this paper were presented at colloquium series at Rice University, UBC, UCSD and NYU. It was also presented at the *New Waves in Relationalism* conference organized by Farid Masrour and Ori Beck, the *Super Saturday Seminar Series* organized by Priyadarshi Jetli, the *Online Perception Series* organized by Neil Mehta, the *Perceiving Properties in a World of Objects* conference at the University of Oxford organized by Dominic Alford-Duguid, Roberta Locatelli and Ivan Ivanov, and a session of my seminar on the *Metaphysics of Color* at Brandeis University. Thanks to the organizers and participants for their helpful feedback. Special thanks to Dominic Alford-Duguid, Imogen Dickie, Anil Gupta, Eli Hirsch, Priyadarshi Jetli, Ian Phillips, Kranti Saran, Srita Tamang, and an anonymous referee for extended feedback on earlier drafts. Finally, thanks to Peter Epstein for having read and commented on more drafts than either of us can remember.

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