

The Problem of Illusion for Naive Realism^{*}

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1 Introduction

I am grateful for the opportunity to contribute to a discussion of naive realism on the Brains Blog.

Boyd Millar (2015) defends the traditional view that naive realism is to be rejected because it cannot account for illusions. He considers candidate naive realist perspectives on illusory experiences, and rejects them. I comment on two such candidate approaches (§3 and §4). For each, I will try to bring out how more needs to be done to reject them, and thus naive realism. I then highlight an alternative naive realist approach which Millar neglects, but which he'd need to reject if he is to reject naive realism (§5). I begin with the problem of illusion for naive realism, and some queries about Millar's initial presentation of the problem.

2 The Problem of Illusion

Let's focus, as Millar does, on visual experience, and naive realism about visual experience. According to the naive realist, when I see a red apple, say, and it looks certain ways to me, my experience is fundamentally a relation between myself and the apple and some of its qualities, from a certain perceptual perspective or standpoint. The experience fundamentally consists in me *perceiving* or being *consciously acquainted with*, or being *sensorily aware of* the apple and some of its qualities from a certain perceptual perspective. Now suppose the

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character of my experience is such that the apple looks red to me. The naive realist can account for this as follows: what grounds or explains this character is, in part, the apple and its qualities, things which are there as constituents of my experience, really present, thanks to my perceptual relation to them. The conscious character of my experience is constitutively shaped by the worldly objects and qualities which I am related to.

But now consider illusory visual experiences. Suppose that such experiences are cases where one sees an object and it looks *F* to one, when in fact it is not *F*. The problem for naive realism, as it's presented by Millar, does not have the form of the traditional argument from illusion. Just as well, given that that argument is invalid and arguably has false premises.¹ The problem is put instead like this:

However, there is a cost associated with this account: naïve realism seems unable to allow for perceptual error. When you suffer an illusion the object you perceive doesn't instantiate some of the properties you perceive it as instantiating—but you can only be perceptually acquainted with some property so long as the object you perceive actually instantiates that property... Since denying that perceptual errors occur would seem to be implausible, the apparent inability of naïve realism to allow for their occurrence has led many to reject the theory out of hand (p. 608).

The way problem is put here is in terms of the inability of naive realism to even *allow for* cases of illusion. Presumably the argument could then be construed as follows:

- (1) Naive realism is true.
- (2) If naive realism is true, there are no illusions.
- (3) There are illusions.

CONTRADICTION

The argument is that with plausible assumptions naive realism leads to contradiction, thus we can reject naive realism.

If this is the problem of illusion for naive realism, then it is unclear that it needs to be taken seriously. For it is unclear what support there is for (2). We would need to know more from Millar about why naive realism is 'unable to

¹On which, see French and Walters (2015) and Crane and French (2015).

allow' for illusion. What is it about naive realism and about illusion which is such that if naive realism is true, then there are no illusions (or more generally, cases of perceptual error)? What principles justify that claim? Millar notes that in an illusion the object isn't *F* even though you perceive it as *F*, thus the way *F*-ness figures in experience is not by the subject being acquainted with it. But why should that mean that illusions are ruled out by naive realism? What is it about naive realism which gets us to that result? That is simply not clear.

However, maybe Millar doesn't himself endorse this argument against naive realism. He does put things in terms of an *apparent* inability of naive realism to allow for illusion. But if he doesn't endorse this argument, then what *is* the argument from illusion against naive realism?

I'm not sure what Millar's answer to this is, but we can proceed anyway, in terms of a central theme that runs through Millar's discussion. The theme is that of how a naive realist can *account for* illusory experiences. (So here it is not assumed that naive realism doesn't *allow for* illusions, the focus is on what a naive realist is to say about the nature of illusions, and whether there is anything plausible to be said from a naive realist perspective). We can put this in terms of a problem or an explanatory challenge: it looks as if the naive realist model for explaining perceptual experience and its character sketched above cannot apply to illusory experiences. In an illusion the object looks *F* to one, yet this is *illusion*, thus there is no instance of *F*-ness there in experience to constitutively shape its conscious character. So how *is* the naive realist to account for illusory experiences? Millar's approach is then to consider candidate answers to this question, and reject them, and thus to reject naive realism.

I am sceptical about whether there is a valid argument which moves from the premise that candidate naive realist explanations of illusion fail to the rejection of naive realism. (How exactly is this argument to be formulated anyway?) But I won't dwell on that because I think that Millar hasn't done enough to support the premise. That will be my focus. I consider naive realist accounts, or responses to this challenge, which fall into two camps. First, there is a response which agrees that the naive realist model cannot apply to illusions, but which says that we can preserve the naive realist model for veridical cases and give some alternative account of illusions. Millar finds one version of this approach problematic, I discuss it in §3. Second, there are responses which deny that the naive realist model cannot apply to illusions. Millar finds various versions of this approach problematic. I discuss one in §4 and, another (which Millar neglects) in §5.

3 Illusions as Hallucinations

One naive realist response to the problem of illusion that Millar considers is one on which it is admitted that the naive realist model doesn't apply to illusions, but that naive realism can be preserved for veridical experiences. The version of this approach that Millar considers has it that illusory experiences are like hallucinations. So whatever account of hallucination a naive realist might want to give (see e.g., Martin (2006), Fish (2009), Logue (2012a)), they can plug it in here to account for illusions (or the illusory aspects of experience). What, according to Millar, is wrong with this?

Millar considers cases which are partly illusory and partly veridical. For instance, suppose I see a yellow cube and veridically perceive its shape (I see it as a cube), but am subject to colour illusion: I see it as purple. Our naive realist, according to Millar, holds that such cases are

a kind of hybrid, composed of both veridical and hallucinatory elements: the veridical elements of perceptual phenomenology are constituted by acquaintance with an object's properties, while the illusory elements are not... (p. 613).

The experience is not an hallucination, it is still a case where the cube is *seen*. However, the illusory aspects of it are understood as hallucinatory aspects. Millar rejects a view of this sort. The argument is given here:

The principal difficulty is that such a theory is inconsistent with the fact that the distinct phenomenal features instantiated by a given perceptual experience are, to a significant extent, interdependent. For instance, as Fish (2009: 44) and Smith (2010: 389) note, when you see the shape of a coloured object, you see the object's shape in virtue of seeing its colour. But visual illusions often occur where the subject accurately perceives an object's shape but misperceives its colour. In such a case, then, the naive realist can't claim that your experience's shape phenomenology is constituted by your acquaintance with the object's shape, while your experience's colour phenomenology is constituted by something else (pp. 612-613).

How can we unpack this argument? It relies on the following principle:

(P) when you see the shape of a coloured object, you see the object's shape in virtue of seeing its colour.

Call the naive realist response we are considering the *Hallucination Approach*. Millar's argument seems to be this: (P) is true, but the Hallucination Approach is inconsistent with (P), therefore the Hallucination Approach is false.

But why is the Hallucination Approach inconsistent with (P)? Suppose our test case is broken down into the following elements:

Test Case

- (1) S sees a yellow cube,
- (2) she accurately sees its cubic shape. That is:
 - (2a) she sees its cubic shape, and
 - (2b) she sees the cube as having this shape. But
- (3) she is subject to colour illusion, she misperceives the object's colour in this sense: the object is yellow, but she sees it as purple.

Now on the face of it this is not inconsistent with (P). Our subject might still be able to see the object's cubic shape in virtue of *seeing its colour*. Our construal of the test case does not so far state that our subject does not *see* the object's colour, but that she misperceives it in the sense of seeing the *object* to have a colour other than the one it has. For all we've said *this* may involve the subject seeing the *yellowness* of the object but in such a way – in such peculiar circumstances – that the object looks *purple* to her. However, I take it that Millar's thought is that the *Hallucination Approach* builds something more into the construal of the test case, that is:

- (4) S is subject to colour illusion, she sees the object as having a colour it doesn't have, *and this aspect is to be treated as if it is hallucination with the result being that the subject simply doesn't see the colour of the object at all.*

So according to the Hallucination Approach as Millar construes it, being subject to colour illusion is an extreme form of colour blindness: the colour the object has literally cannot be seen. Insofar as there are still colour *appearances*, this is hallucination. The object is misperceived colour-wise, but its *colour* is not *misperceived*, its colour is simply not seen. But then we have a treatment of the test case which violates (P). For we have a situation in which the subject sees the shape of a coloured object yet *not* in virtue of seeing its colour – for our subject doesn't see the colour (the yellowness) of the object at all.

If this is what the argument is supposed to be, I have two remarks.

First, it applies not just to a naive realist who endorses the Hallucination Approach. For as I've spelled it out, what is really generating the conflict with

(P) is the claim that S's experience is a case in which S *cannot see* the colour of the object. But this claim is not peculiar to a naive realist who endorses the Hallucination Approach. This claim could be taken on board in, for instance, an *intentionalist* construal of the test case. Unless the intentionalist claims that we *can see* the object's colour in the test case, they too will not be able to account for how the subject sees the object's shape, given (P).

This point in itself doesn't help the naive realist, but it does show that insofar as we have a problem here it is not a special problem for the naive realist. It might also loosen us up to wondering whether (P) is true.

My second remark takes this up. One option for a naive realist wanting to defend the Hallucination Approach would be to question (P). Millar's argument as I've construed it relies upon (P), but (P) stands in need of clarification and justification. One thing which is not clear about (P), given Millar's discussion, is what it *means* to claim that when the shape of a coloured object is seen it is seen *in virtue of* seeing its colour. But we need not dwell upon that, since Millar doesn't actually need the 'in virtue of' aspect of (P) for his argument. Given, as I've suggested, that the conflict with (P) is generated by the idea that in colour illusions we do not see the object's colour, all (P) needs to involve is the idea that whenever one sees a coloured object's shape one sees its colour.

Why think that (P) (or the weaker version) is true? Millar writes as if (P) flows from what we can call the *interdependence claim*. In our case, the idea here is that the shape aspect of phenomenology, and the colour aspect, are in some significant sense interdependent. But why think, in line with (P), that when one has such interdependence in phenomenology, it is to be accounted for in terms of links between states or episodes of *seeing*? That is not clear.

Consider again the intentionalist approach. The intentionalist might want to say that in our case we don't *see* the colour of the object. Insofar as the object appears purple to one, this is merely (partly) because it is *represented as* purple. But does this mean that the intentionalist can't account for the interdependence of the shape aspect of phenomenology and the colour aspect? No. For they can claim that the object's shape is represented (and seen, and visually apparent) partly in virtue of the *representation of* colour. Likewise, a naive realist endorsing the Hallucination Approach thinks that the object's colour is not seen. Does this mean that they can't account for the interdependence of the shape aspect of the phenomenology and the colour aspect? No. For they can claim that S is subject to the shape appearances she is subject to, and (given the conditions) sees the cubic shape of the object, partly in virtue of being subject to colour *appearances*. So if the naive realist endorsing the Hallucination Approach accepts the interdependence claim, they need not accept (P), they could instead take illusory colour appearances (construed according to whichever account of hallucination

they favour) to be a condition on shape appearances (and visual perception of shape).

4 The Situational Approach

A different naive realist response holds that the naive realist model *can* be applied to illusions after all. The general version of this approach I want to consider is what I'll call the *Looks Approach*. I'll consider a specific version of it in this section which I'll call the *Situational Approach*, and in the next section I'll consider another version of it which I'll call the *Parsimonious Approach*. But first, let's outline the Looks Approach.

Millar introduces the Looks Approach with respect to the issue of what makes an experience illusory. He puts it like this:

That is, the naive realist can claim that what makes an experience illusory is not that you experience the perceived object as having some property it lacks, but that you perceive a special sort of property that it instantiates—a property that is typical or characteristic of a kind of which the object you perceive is not an instance. This special sort of property will be a *look* or *appearance*, where these are understood as mind-independent properties of objects with which subjects can be perceptually acquainted (p. 616).

I think that framing the issue in terms of what makes an experience illusory leads Millar astray, but we'll come back to that later. For now, let's consider the Looks Approach not with respect to that question, but with respect to the central issue that Millar is concerned with: naive realist accounts of illusion. How can a Looks Approach help the naive realist account for illusory experiences?

To answer this, let's work, to begin, with Millar's example of the circular object (a coin, say) seen as elliptical. Consider this claim:

- (1) The coin looks elliptical.

The Looks Approach understands (1) as saying that the coin has an elliptical way of looking. On the intended understanding, (1) is not a claim about seeing, or about the way the coin now looks *to the subject*, it is a claim about *the coin*.

Having thus delineated such features of objects, the naive realist is able to apply their model to illusions: I see *O* as *F* (where *O* is not in fact *F*). My experience (and its character) is understood, at least in part, in terms of a subject perceiving the object and some of its features, in particular its *looks*. Among the

features one perceives we include the ways objects look. The object has an *F* way of looking, the perception of which is part of what accounts for how in seeing *O* the object looks *F* to the subject. Using the example: when I have an illusory perception of the coin and it looks elliptical to me, this is understood, at least in part, in terms of my perceiving the coin and its elliptical look.

A substantial part of Millar's engagement with the Looks Approach comes in the form of engagement with Brewer (2006, 2008, 2011). But, as Millar recognizes (p. 618, fn 18), Brewer himself has a slightly different approach to the Looks Approach as I've just spelled it out. Thus Millar talks of 'Brewer-inspired' approaches (p. 618, fn 18). The Looks Approach as we have it so far claims that the looks of things play the role they do in explaining phenomenal character by being perceived, by being among the things one is consciously acquainted with in perceptual experience. In contrast, Brewer's emphasis is usually on conscious acquaintance with *mind-independent physical objects*.

Now that is not to say that Brewer eschews any role for the ways perceived objects are in explaining phenomenal character. Consider the following:

this characterization of perceptual presentation as conscious acquaintance with mind-independent physical objects provides the most fundamental elucidation of which modification of consciousness any specific such experience is: the fundamental nature of perceptual experience is to be given precisely by citing and/or describing those very mind-independent physical objects of acquaintance (2011, p. 94).

the direct objects of perception provide the most basic categorization of an experience of acquaintance with those objects as the specific modification of consciousness that it is. The identity and nature of such entities serve to elucidate what it is to be in that very conscious experiential condition (p. 95).

According to Brewer, perceptual experiences are relations to physical objects, but which modification of consciousness any such experience is will depend upon how that object is, its identity and nature. Which features a given physical object has matters to the conscious character of one's experience of it. Given this, and given that a significant portion of Millar's engagement with the Looks Approach involves engagement with Brewer's ideas, let's understand the Looks Approach more broadly than above, then, to include Brewer's approach. The central idea of the approach is that among the features of perceived objects that play an explanatory role, when it comes to the character of illusory experiences, are *the*

looks of objects. Whether such looks play their explanatory role by themselves being *perceived* or somehow else, we can leave open.

How more specifically might a naive realist pursuing the Looks Approach understand looks properties? On one account, these looks properties are ‘relational properties’ (Millar, p. 618):

Specifically, one might appeal to the [relational] properties an object instantiates that change with objects to viewing conditions: the direction and quality of the light hitting the object, the orientation of the object relative to the perceiver’s vantage point, the visual angle the object subtends, and so on (pp. 618-619).

Adopting and modifying some terminology from Schellenberg (2008), Millar calls such properties: *situational properties*. What’s the idea here? The coin looks elliptical, (1) is true. Yet the coin is round. The elliptical look of the coin is a special feature of the coin that it has only in relation to aspects of the environment it is in: a situational property. Millar understands Brewer as endorsing something like this. And this seems right. Consider, for instance, Brewer’s treatment of a case where a white piece of chalk looks red, owing to peculiar lighting conditions. Here, Brewer explains how he accounts for such a case given his object view, ‘(OV)’, that is, his brand of naive realism:

Again, the (OV) proposal is that the perceptual experience in question is most fundamentally a matter of the subject’s conscious acquaintance with that very piece of chalk itself: a particular persisting mind-independent physical object. From the viewpoint in question, and, most importantly in this case, given the relevant perceptual circumstances—especially, of course, the abnormally red illumination—it has visually relevant similarities with a paradigm red piece of chalk, of just that size and shape. Their visually relevant similarity consists in the similarity of the light reflected from both. Thus, the white chalk looks red... (2011, p. 106)

The idea here is that the piece of white chalk is a certain way, it looks red. This consists in its visually relevant similarities with a paradigm red piece of chalk. Such visually relevant similarities are what Millar calls situational properties. The piece of chalk has the particular red look/visually relevant similarities it has, in part because of how it is situated: in part because of how it relates to the illumination. Holding all else fixed, changing the situation (e.g., altering the illumination to natural daylight), will change the way the chalk looks/its visually relevant similarities.

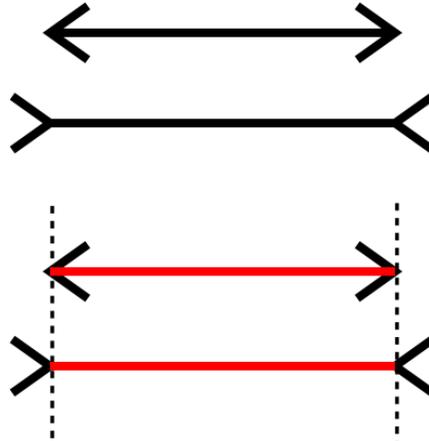


Figure 1: Müller-Lyer Illusion, from <http://pnpsyphi.blogspot.com/2015/02/an-ecological-note-on-muller-lyer.html>

Similarly, a straight stick partially submerged in water has a bent look. This is, according to Brewer, a property it doesn't have when there is a relevant change to the situation and its relations (e.g., when taken out of water). It's a situational property. And it is a property which consists in its visually relevant similarities to a paradigm bent stick (p. 106). Consider also the Müller-Lyer illusion (see Fig. 1). In this case, two lines of equal length look different in length. The lines are 'made to look different in length by the addition of misleading hashes' (p. 102). Relative to the particular situation, which includes such hashes, the lines look unequal in length. This is, according to Brewer, a property the lines don't have when there is a relevant change to the situation and their relations (e.g., with mere removal of the hashes). It's a situational property. And it is a property which consists in the lines bearing visually relevant similarities to a paradigm pair of lines which are unequal in length (p. 102).

Let's call Brewer's version of the Looks Approach, which embeds this understanding of looks properties, the *Situational Approach*. Millar claims that

if the naïve realist equates looks with situational properties, she won't be able to appeal to looks in order to account for illusions (p. 619).

But why is this? Millar raises two problems:

- (A) A problem about constancy (p. 619).
- (B) A problem about generality (pp. 619-620).

I'll return to (A) shortly. But first let's consider (B).

4.1 Generality

Millar puts the problem like this: 'in many of the sorts of illusions at issue, there are no appropriate situational properties that the naïve realist can plausibly invoke' (p. 619). Millar attempts to justify this with reference to the Müller-Lyer illusion, the case of the straight stick in water seen as bent, and the case of the circular object seen as elliptical. First:

Regarding the Müller-Lyer diagram, Brewer (2006: 168-69, 2011: 102) points to the fact that under normal viewing conditions the lines subtend the same visual angle, just as a paradigm example of two unequal lines at slightly different distances from the perceiver do. But, of course, a paradigm example of two equal lines at the same distance from the perceiver also subtend the same visual angle, so this situational property is not suggestive of inequality in length. (Brewer suggests that the arrows in the Müller-Lyer diagram operate as misleading depth cues, but the arrows can be replaced with circles and the illusion is unaffected). (p. 619)

I'm interested in the latter situational property: to do with the relation between the lines and the arrows or hashes which operate as misleading depth cues. Call this situational property *S1*. Millar is right that the arrows can be replaced with circles and we still have a case where equal lines look unequal (see Fig. 2). That is, a version of the Müller-Lyer illusion involves situational property *S2* – a property the lines have in relation to the circles. But it is unclear why Millar thinks this is relevant to discrediting what Brewer has to say of the Müller-Lyer case involving hashes. It certainly doesn't show that Brewer is not entitled to appeal to *S1* to explain the experience one has when looking at the Müller-Lyer diagram involving hashes. *That* sort of case can be explained by appeal to *S1*, other cases can be explained by appeal to other situational properties.

Maybe Millar's point is that the two cases, the one involving hashes the other involving circles, are each cases where the lines look unequal. The unequal look, common across the cases, can't be *S1*, as that is not common across the cases (similarly for *S2*). But Brewer is not claiming anything to the contrary. There are different ways for lines to look unequal. Instantiating *S1* is one way, instantiating *S2* is another, presumably being unequal is yet another. So I don't see what grounds Millar has here to dismiss the situational properties Brewer might appeal to for Müller-Lyer cases.

What about the other cases? Millar offers the following:

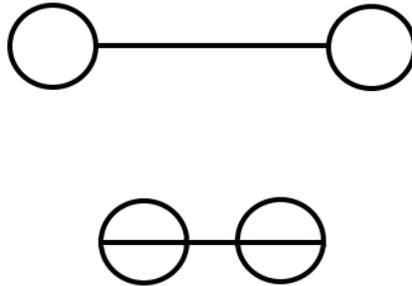


Figure 2: Müller-Lyer Illusion, from <http://www.skidmore.edu/~hfoley/PerCLabs/Distance.htm>

And regarding the circular object viewed through the lens, the presence of the lens does not seem to alter any pertinent shape-related situational features. When discussing the similar case of the straight stick half submerged in water, Brewer claims that the visually relevant similarity between the straight stick and a paradigm bent stick is that in the region of space “above the refracting surface of the liquid... light from corresponding parts of the two sticks travels, or would travel, along the same paths” (2011: 106). But, first, the path the light travels between some particular point in space and your eye is not something you can visually perceive. And, second, unlike the case of the stick in water, once the light reflected by the circular object has passed through the refracting medium of the lens, it does not travel along the same path that light reflected by an elliptical object would travel (pp. 619–620).

It is not obvious quite what Millar’s concern is, but here is one interpretation:

Millar’s Concern

The stick looks bent. And this consists in it having visually relevant similarities to a bent thing. Part of what this involves is that light from corresponding parts of the two sticks – the straight stick partially submerged, and the paradigm bent stick – travels or would travel along the same paths. But appealing to this property cannot

help us to account for the illusory experience of the straight stick as bent. For this property – the bent look – cannot be seen.

If this accurately represents Millar’s worry, then I think it needs further justification. To elicit that, here are two critical questions:

- (1) The first question grants that the bent look isn’t seen, but asks why this should be problematic. Suppose it is true that the bent look isn’t seen. Does this mean that its instantiation by the stick cannot play a role in explaining why when the *stick* is seen, it looks bent? Even supposing that the look is not seen or an object of acquaintance, it might still be that it is partly because the seen stick has a bent look that conscious acquaintance with it (the stick) constitutes a modification of consciousness in which the stick looks bent to the subject.
- (2) The second question queries the grounds Millar offers for thinking that the bent look isn’t seen. Suppose that the stick looks bent or has the visually relevant similarities it has in part because it is a certain way with respect to light, call this way *W*. (That is, *W* is the property of the stick which captures the way its parts interact with light, which is part of what makes it similar to a paradigm bent stick). Now suppose that *W*, or the stick’s being *W*, cannot be seen. (I take it that this is what Millar is getting at when he says ‘the path the light travels between some particular point in space and your eye is not something you can visually perceive.’) The question is why should this mean or support the claim that the bent look of the stick cannot be seen? The bent look is not *identical* to *W*, it is partially constituted by *W*. An inability to see the constitutive basis of something doesn’t necessarily entail an inability to see the constituted thing. Compare: this piece of fruit is constituted by subatomic particles. I cannot see those subatomic parts. Does that mean that I cannot see the piece of fruit? No. Similarly, the inability to see the constitutive basis of a look does not obviously mean that one cannot see the look.

To put the point another way: it seems obvious that on inspecting the straight stick in water one can visually apprehend its bent look (or that its bent look *somehow* figures in visual experience). There is some complicated environmental and situational story to be told, according to Brewer, about how the stick has this look. The elements appealed to in this story may not be visually given, but that doesn’t show that the look is not visually given.²

²Hilbert’s discussion of the fallacy of total information and the partiality of perception is

Unless I have misunderstood Millar's reasoning, then, I am not sure that he has discredited what Brewer has to say about the case in which a straight stick looks bent to a subject.

What about the circular object which looks elliptical when viewed through a lens? It is not clear to me what justifies Millar's assertion that 'the presence of the lens does not seem to alter any pertinent shape-related situational features.' Perhaps Millar is right that the explanation offered for the straight stick looking bent case won't carry over to this case. But that obviously doesn't establish that there are *no* relevant situational properties available for the naive realist to draw on in explaining such a case.

4.2 Constancy

As noted above, Millar has a second worry. It is initially put as follows:

thanks to perceptual constancy mechanisms, even significant variations in situational properties do not usually produce illusory visual experiences. Consider, for instance a typical example of shape constancy: when you view a tilted penny you might see that the visual angles it subtends in various dimensions are identical to those subtended by a paradigm elliptical object viewed head on; nonetheless you still see that the penny is circular (p. 619).

The issue Millar raises here is similar to the issue he raises later when the objection is that even if we grant the naive realist's appeal to looks properties, there is still a problem (p. 617). The problem is spelled out with the following example:

Typical examples of perceptual constancy illustrate the difficulty. On any pertinent account of looks, when you view a tilted penny it will instantiate a look that paradigm elliptical objects instantiate; but, even assuming that you perceive this look you do not misperceive the penny. You perceive the penny to be circular rather than elliptical (which it is) and you perceive it to have a certain look, one that is shared by elliptical objects viewed head on (which it has). Or, imagine that you see a uniformly white cube lit in such a way that one of its faces is darker than the rest due to an ached shadow. In such a situation the relevant surface will possess a look that paradigm grey objects instantiate under direct lighting; but when you view the cube, even assuming that you perceive that this surface has the

relevant here, see Hilbert (1987, Chapter 2).

look at issue, you accurately perceive that it is white. These cases involve perfectly veridical experiences, yet the present account classifies them as illusions (p. 621).

The question is why does the present account – the Situational Approach, or more generally the Looks Approach – have to classify such cases as illusions? This is because Millar takes a proponent of the Looks Approach to commit to the following claim:

According to the proposal at issue, what makes an experience illusory is... that you perceive a look characteristic of a kind of which the object you perceive is not an instance—perceiving this look is sufficient for suffering the illusion (p. 621).

Or, more precisely:

Sufficiency: If O has an F look, but is not in fact F , then seeing O and its F look (or having an experience in which O is seen where the character of this experience is somehow shaped by the F look of O) is sufficient for S to have an illusory experience of O as F .

But then the cases of constancy that Millar discusses (as he understands them) are counterexamples to Sufficiency: I can see a tilted round penny, it has an elliptical look, but is not elliptical, I see it and its elliptical look (or this look figures somehow in my experience) yet I do not illusorily perceive the coin as elliptical, I see it veridically as round.

But it is unclear to me why Millar thinks a proponent of the Looks Approach is committed to Sufficiency. I take it that the Looks Approach rather relies on this central claim: when S is subject to an illusion in which O looks F to her, then this can be accounted for in part by appeal to the F look of O somehow figuring in experience (perhaps as a feature of O that S is consciously acquainted with). But this is not the same as nor does it entail Sufficiency.

Now this central claim is not obviously responsive to the question that Millar raises about what *makes* an experience illusory. But that is irrelevant. Since the current issue is not that issue, but the issue of whether naive realists can account for illusions by appeal to looks properties. And the central claim is relevant to that issue. This is why I claimed earlier that framing the approach in terms of what makes an experience illusory has lead Millar astray. As far as I can tell, it leads him to saddle the Looks Approach with Sufficiency, and then object to the approach by objecting to Sufficiency. But I don't think a proponent of the Looks Approach should endorse Sufficiency. And in any case Sufficiency is not

needed for a proponent of the Looks Approach to respond to the challenge put by Millar to the naive realist: how to account for illusion.

5 The Parsimonious Approach

Situational properties are visible properties of objects over and above the basic visible properties of objects. I've been critical of Millar's rejection of the version of the Looks Approach which invokes such properties. I now want to construct a different version of the Looks Approach by invoking a different view of looks properties, that put forward by Martin (2010). On Martin's approach, ways of looking are

among the properties that objects have anyway... i.e. those properties we must ascribe them in order to understand the truth of statements about them that are warranted through visual grounds without yet considering any explicit talk about the looks of things...[e.g., shapes and colours.] (p. 195)

Martin calls this Parsimony – it is a parsimonious account of looks properties, compared to the situational account. Millar quickly dismisses Martin's approach in the following footnote:

Martin (2010) characterizes looks as mind-independent properties of objects, but because he identifies such properties with basic visible properties such as shape, size, and colour, appealing to looks as Martin understands them would not help the naïve realist provide an account of illusion (p. 617, fn 17).

But Millar needs to explain what's wrong with Martin's approach. For with Martin's account of looks, we can construct an alternative version of the Looks Approach on behalf of the naive realist. If Millar wants to reject naive realism based on the problem of illusion, he'll have to reject this alternative too.

First, a few brief details about Martin's account of looks properties. Consider the following:

- (1) The stick looks bent.

How are we to understand this, according to Martin? Roughly, (1) attributes to the stick a state that is relevantly similar to the characteristic look of bent things (p. 197). And we can assume that what is characteristic of bent things with

respect to their look is their bent shape (p. 197). But then for (1) to be true ‘the stick would have to have a look state that is relevantly similar to a state of being bent’ (p. 197). Suppose then that we are using (1) to talk of a bent stick. So far so good for Parsimony: the stick’s bent look can be its bent shape, since its bent shape is, trivially, relevantly similar to the state of being bent.

However, what if we imagine (1) uttered in a context which Martin calls HALF WATER (p. 219), where a *straight* stick is partially submerged in water? In this context, (1) expresses a truth. The straight stick has a bent look. On this occasion, the bent look of the stick cannot be its bent shape – it doesn’t have a bent shape. So now it might seem as if we need to introduce some special situational property of the stick to be its bent look. If that’s right, it *doesn’t* mean that looks are always such properties. We haven’t gone back on the way we’ve understood the case of the *bent* stick looking bent. Though it does mean that Parsimony will fail for certain cases.

But we need to think further about whether such special cases really do lead us to reject Parsimony. As Martin notes,

The problem is... one of understanding what the relevant gloss on [(1)] should be in this case: Someone who utters [(1)] truly commits to there being a relevant similarity between the stick’s way of looking and that look characteristic of bent things, namely (according to Parsimony), being bent. But if the stick is *not* bent, in what way is it relevantly similar to something bent? (p. 208)

The answer that a proponent of Parsimony will have to give is that the stick is relevantly similar to something bent in virtue of its basic visible properties: ‘most saliently its length and shape, and potentially its surface colour’ (p. 220). So one answer that a proponent of Parsimony might give to Martin’s question is that the stick partially submerged in water is relevantly similar to something bent in virtue of its actual shape, its straightness. Thus the proponent of Parsimony can claim that the bent look of the stick is reducible to its straight shape. (I work with this simple reduction for the sake of argument and ease of discussion. But given that figure appearance can be affected by colour elements in a scene, a better developed application of Parsimony here would reduce the bent look of the stick to a fusion of the stick’s shape, colour, and perhaps other of its basic visible qualities).³

But how can the stick be relevantly similar to something bent in virtue of its *straight* shape? We can note that a subject in the circumstances of HALF WATER looking at the straight stick will be inclined to find the actual shape

³Thanks to Mike Martin here.

before her – the stick’s straight shape – as more like being bent than anything else (p. 215). But now, Martin notes

if that is true, we have a simple answer to the question of what could be in common between the way the stick is [that is, in being straight] and the way bent things are. The stick is similar to bent things simply with respect to how it strikes *me*, or the subjective bearing it has on me (p. 215).

The psychological impact that the straight shape of the stick has on a subject who utters (1) in HALF WATER is similar to the psychological impact that the bent shape of a paradigm bent stick has on a subject who sees such a thing for what it is. In that respect – with that subjective measure of similarity – the straight shape of the stick is relevantly similar to a bent shape. Thus, Parsimony can be secured even for our special cases.

Now, even if we grant Parsimony, we haven’t yet said anything about how this can help the naive realist account for illusions. And this is something that Martin doesn’t go into. Here I think the naive realist can once again appeal, as above, to the Looks Approach. But now instead of viewing looks as situational properties, they view them as basic visible qualities, appealing instead to Parsimony. Call this the *Parsimonious Approach*. The idea is this: when one is subject to illusion, an object which is not *F* looks *F* to her, this experience and its character is to be accounted for, in part, in terms of the subject genuinely perceiving or being consciously acquainted with the object and its looks – *its basic visible qualities*. For instance, when a subject has an illusory experience in which a straight stick partly submerged in water looks bent to them, this is to be accounted for in the standard naive realist way: in terms of perception of the stick and some of its properties. The naive realist can say that the stick looks bent to one partly because one is acquainted with the stick and its bent look, i.e., its actual shape.

What’s wrong with this approach? Perhaps Parsimony is to be rejected. If so, why? Or perhaps Millar is happy to accept Parsimony (at least for the sake of argument) but thinks that this can be of no comfort to the naive realist. I suspect that Millar will at least want to pursue this objection, so I will end with a couple of remarks on that.

I suspect that that Millar will object to the Parsimonious Approach on the grounds that the actual straight shape of the stick is not seen in a case when one is subject to shape illusion and the stick looks bent to one. This is suggested by what Millar says (or supposes a naive realist should say) about another case: a case where a circular object is viewed through a lens and it looks elliptical to one:

after all, you aren't acquainted with the object's ellipticalness since it isn't elliptical, and, thanks to the interference of the lens, neither are you acquainted with its circularity (p. 622)

Perhaps Millar thinks, then, that it would be implausible for a naive realist to suppose that in a shape illusion one nonetheless sees the actual shape of the object. That is, perhaps he thinks the naive realist should commit to the idea that shape illusion is a radical form of shape blindness.

But if this is Millar's view, it needs justification. Why should a naive realist have such commitments? It might be that when the straight stick is seen, so is its straightness, but the straightness is seen in such *a way* or such *a manner* that it is not evident to the subject that they are confronting straightness, and in such a way or manner that the stick looks *bent* to the subject.

If naive realism is a view on which perceptual experience is radically transparent to the objects and qualities it is of, then it might be difficult to see how such an account is coherent. That is, if we suppose that naive realism is a view on which the character of a perceptual experience is constituted entirely by the objects and qualities the subject perceives, it might be hard to make sense of the idea that a subject be acquainted with straightness and it not reveal itself as such in the character of the subject's experience. But naive realists should not, and many do not, endorse such radical transparency. Naive realists should insist that the character of a perceptual experience is *part* constituted by its presented entities. But this leaves room for much else that is relevant to the constitution of phenomenal character: ways of experiencing such entities and modifications of the perceptual relation at the heart of such experience (Martin (1998), Soteriou (2013)), the perceptual perspective or standpoint involved in such experience, involving e.g., the point of view in vision, and circumstances of perception (Campbell (2009), Brewer (2011), Kalderon (2011)), as well as facts about the subject of experience Logue (2012b).

I'll end, then, with this question: given that naive realism is not committed to radical transparency, what is wrong with the Parsimonious Approach?

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