

Overlap: On the Relation Between Perceiving and Believing

Imagine seeing your friend across the street. You then come to believe that your friend is located across the street. The common assumption is that this is a succession of separate states. The perceptual experience and the belief, though related, are ultimately distinct. I argue that, in some cases, there is identity between the experience and the belief. That is, a single mental state can be both a belief and an experience at the same time. Belief and experience are not identical qua type, but they share some of their tokens. There is overlap between the two types.

Here is how it works. Perceptual experience, in most cases, provides access to content.¹ When I see a dog in a tree, the content *there is a dog in the tree* becomes accessible. I can directly infer that something is wrong, for example. I claim that this allows experiences to, sometimes, engage in belief-like behaviors. Since, on some popular views, functioning like a belief is all there is to being a belief, this means that the experience in question is a belief as well. The experience retains its access providing role, its content, and its phenomenology², all while being a belief. I also allow that some, though not all, beliefs have a rich phenomenology and nonconceptual content. Of course, not all perceptual experiences become beliefs. We do not always trust our senses.

By perceptual experience, I mean the conscious undergoing of a perceptual state, complete with content and phenomenology. I will ignore forms of perception that are either unconscious or sub-personal. In what follows, I mean perceptual experience when I use terms like “experiences” and “perception”.

In the first section, I describe the nature of overlap further. My proposal is contrasted with similar accounts in the literature, and I discuss possible objections. The second section shows the epistemic benefits of accepting the possibility of overlap. All in all, overlap is a promising idea that is worth investigating further.

I Perception, Belief and Overlap

Overlap occurs when a single token mental state falls under multiple types. For example, there might be token identity between a belief and an experience. My perceiving of the dog in the tree just is my belief that there is a dog in the tree. However, it does not follow that we have any kind of type identity on our hands. Belief and experience are still different types. They just happen to share some of their tokens. Overlap is also consistent with the intuition that not all experiences are beliefs. For instance, I might see

¹ More or less the same notion of access found in Block, 2002, p. 208–10.

² There is no obvious limit to the phenomenology of perception. Overlap is compatible with overflow. Block, 2011.

an apple without believing that there is an apple there. Perhaps I think I am hallucinating. Likewise, some beliefs are not experiences. My belief that Kant was German is not an experience. Beliefs and experiences sometimes overlap, but not always.

In the first section, I contrast my proposal with others in the literature (I.1), and then describe it in more detail (I.2). The other two subsections deal with objections, one concerning nonconceptual content (I.3) and the other concerning phenomenology (I.4).

I.1

The idea that some mental types can, but do not always, overlap can be found in numerous places. For example, O'Callaghan (2021) claims that some experiences belong to multiple senses. This means a token experience might be both visual and auditory, thus falling under two distinct mental types. Hazlett (2021) has argued that some token desires are also cases of knowledge. Schwitzgebel (2013) allows for some cases of overlap between belief and desire, and seems open to further occurrences of overlap.

The idea that at least part of an experience is or can be identical with a belief has also been defended before. Dual component views hold that perceptual experiences consist of a conceptual aspect without a rich phenomenology and a nonconceptual aspect with a rich phenomenology. On one traditional version of this view, held amongst others by Reid (1997) and more recently defended by Quilty-Dunn (2015), the conceptual aspect of experiences simply are beliefs. This means that every perceptual experience contains a belief, while also containing non-belief aspects. A more modest variety of such a view belongs to Lyons (2009, p. 71), who claims that the conceptual aspects of experience (which he calls percepts) can be beliefs, but are not always. They can also be conceptual states produced by perceptual processing that do not perform belief-like functions. On the Reid/Quilty-Dunn view, the conceptual aspect is always a belief.

Finally, there are the doxastic accounts defended by Byrne, Glüer, and Armstrong. Armstrong (1993, ch. 10) held that experience is the acquisition of a belief, meaning it is an event rather than a mental state proper. Byrne (2016) claims that experiencing that *p* entails believing that *p*. This is similar to Williamson's (2000) view that knowing that *p* entails believing that *p*. For both Byrne and Williamson, neither knowledge nor perception is belief plus something else. Finally, Glüer (2009) holds that experience is a subspecies of belief. In particular, to experience *x* as having property *p* means ascribing to *x* the property of looking like having *p*. For instance, seeing a red apple is, for Glüer, believing that the apple looks red.

The view I defend here differs from the ones above. I hold, *pace* dual component views and Byrne, that the entire experience can be a belief, including its phenomenological aspects. As mentioned earlier, I also take it that experiences do not have to be, or contain, any beliefs. They might be beliefs, but are not always. In this, I agree with Lyons, but oppose the others. Further, I treat perceptual experiences as mental states (*pace* Armstrong) with content that ascribes regular properties to objects, rather than merely indicating that objects look a certain way (*pace* Glüer). Lastly, I will argue that overlap can even occur if the content of the perceptual experience is nonconceptual in nature. That means that some beliefs, on my view, can have nonconceptual contents. While nonconceptual beliefs have also been suggested by Bermúdez (1998), none of the authors mentioned above make that move. That makes my view unique among them.

I will occasionally refer back to these various accounts, and discuss the views of Byrne and Glüer more extensively towards the end of the paper. However, the main goal of this paper is to bring a new view to the table, rather than show in detail how it is superior to the alternatives. Which view one ultimately prefers depends on commitments that cannot be discussed within the limits of a single paper. I merely aim to show that on at least one set of plausible commitments, overlap is an attractive view.

1.2

Often, mental states are individuated by their function.³ Belief in particular is often viewed as whatever state functions in a belief-like manner. That is, the subject will be inclined to affirm the belief if asked, will base other beliefs on it, and will rely on it in action.⁴ There is no obvious reason why functions cannot overlap. For example, my phone is both a calculator and a memory bank. It also seems to me that many of my memories are beliefs. In general, overlapping types should be a possibility.

Here is how overlap between perceptual experiences and beliefs is supposed to work. When I perceive with content *p*, my experience usually provides access to *p*. I consider access to be a primitive notion and will not give a precise definition.⁵ However, I do take it to be a familiar notion. When asked when Napoleon became emperor, I might dive into my memory, and hit upon the year 1804. I then report this finding. I accessed the content *Napoleon became emperor in 1804*. When I improvise a story to tell a child, I am accessing the content of that story as I tell it. Basically, whenever I consciously use some

³ One locus classicus being Lewis, 1980.

⁴ For a discussion, see Glüer and Wikforss, 2013.

⁵ See also Block, 2002.

mental content, be it from memory, perception, cognition, or imagination, I access that content.

When p becomes accessible through perception, I can come to believe that p .⁶ I propose that this does not entail that a novel token mental state is created. Rather, the perceptual experience becomes a belief. The original perceptual content and access provided by perception is retained, and the familiar phenomenology of perception also remains.

There are two main ways for experiences to turn into beliefs. First, the subject can endorse the content of her experience. This happens when the subject, however briefly, considers the content of her experience, and decides that it is true. For instance, when I see a dog in a tree, I might first hesitate. After processing what I see for a bit, I take it that there really is a dog in the tree. This allows the experience to perform a belief-like function, informing my actions and other beliefs.

The other option is, I suspect, much more common. Often, we automatically embrace whatever our experiences tell us. When I see a passing car, I typically do not engage in any kind of reflection. Rather, I automatically take it as true that the car is passing. This does not require any kind of agency or decision making on my part. Yet, automatic embracing also allows experience to play a belief-like role. Since fulfilling a belief-like function is all there is to being a belief, the experience is a belief.

For my purposes, either method will do. When the subject endorses, or automatically embraces, the content of an experience, that experience is a belief.

I.3

A problem with this proposal is that perception and belief are often considered to have different kinds of content. On many accounts, thought and belief have conceptual content, whereas perception is assumed to have nonconceptual content. For my purposes, conceptual content is propositional content restrained by the conceptual apparatus of the subject. For instance, the subject cannot have mental states with *that is a sesamoid* as content if the subject does not possess the concept sesamoid. There are two popular theories of nonconceptual content. State-style theories hold that nonconceptual content might be the same in kind as conceptual content, but is not limited by the concepts possessed by the subject. Content-style theories hold that nonconceptual content differs in kind from conceptual content. For instance, imagine conceptual content is Fregean in nature. State-style nonconceptual content might then be Fregean as well, but can include concepts the agent does not possess, like the

⁶ For the purposes of this paper, I am only interested in occurrent belief-formation.

concept sesamoid. Content-style nonconceptual content would not be Fregean, but rather, say, have possible world semantics (Heck 2000).

Nonconceptual content is often richer than conceptual content, containing details and elements for which we do not have words or concepts (Tye 2006; Heck 2000). For instance, when I see a mountain, I do not have a concept for its unique shape.

The problem for overlap is that if perceptual experiences and beliefs have different contents, they cannot overlap. There are two options here. One is to argue that perception does have conceptual content. There are appealing reasons for thinking so.⁷ If that is right, then belief and perception can overlap, since both would have conceptual content.

The second option is to claim that some beliefs have nonconceptual content. Typical beliefs have conceptual content. Endorsed or embraced perceptual experiences are nonconceptual. While I am sympathetic to the first option, I will focus on the second in what follows. That said, I am not committed to any particular account of perceptual content for the purposes of this paper.

This move is not available on all accounts of nonconceptual content. First, I keep the assumption that the content of beliefs must be propositional. While I think there is something tempting about the idea that non-propositional content could also perform belief-like functions, I will not discuss that idea here (Camp 2007).

Second, nonconceptual content is often introduced as a contrast to the content of beliefs and thoughts (Evans 1982; Heck 2000). Overlap is compatible with the idea that nonconceptual content differs from that of typical paradigm beliefs, and can to that degree accommodate this contrastive commitment. But if we are to have beliefs with nonconceptual content, we of course cannot define nonconceptual content as the kind of content beliefs fundamentally cannot have. After all, the idea is that some (non-typical, non-paradigm) beliefs have nonconceptual content. That said, it strikes me as though such a purely negative definition of nonconceptual content is not the most revealing. It is more interesting to look at positive proposals of nonconceptual content, and see whether overlap is compatible with those.

While these two commitments mean that overlap will not be compatible with all accounts of nonconceptual content, I take it that a fair amount of popular options remain. For instance, it is compatible with state-style nonconceptual content. Again, state-style nonconceptual content can be the same kind of content as that of paradigm

⁷ For a good overview of the debate, and a conclusion in favor of the conceptual view, see Speaks, 2005.

beliefs, except that it is not constrained by the subject's conceptual apparatus. This means that state-style nonconceptual content can be propositional, and there are no obstacles qua kind for it featuring in beliefs. The only obstacle is that such contents contain concepts the agent does not possess, which is often considered necessary for being the content of a belief. But that assumption will be rejected in what follows.

This compatibility is significant, since it is often pointed out that most motivations for nonconceptual content can be accommodated with state-style nonconceptual content (Byrne 2005; Crowther 2006; Speaks 2005). However, since others claim that state-style nonconceptual content is impossible without content-style nonconceptual content, I will also discuss that variety.⁸

Whether overlap is compatible with content-style nonconceptual content varies per account. As indicated, any account on which nonconceptual content is non-propositional is out. For example, if nonconceptual content turns out to be iconic (Burge 2018 : Quilty-Dunn 2016), nonconceptual beliefs are impossible. The accounts of Peacocke (1989) and Bermúdez (1998; 2003) will not work either, for the same reason. However, if nonconceptual content is Russellian (Tye 2005) or involves possible world semantics (Lewis 1986), it is compatible with my two commitments. Both kinds are propositional, and are not obviously incapable of featuring in beliefs.

The end result is that overlap is compatible with state-style nonconceptual content, and propositional forms of content-style nonconceptual content. This means that a respectable chunk of accounts of nonconceptual content is at the very least compatible with my two initial commitments. And this is assuming beliefs must be propositional in nature, a commitment that for example Bermúdez (1998; 2003) is happy to drop. Dropping it would open the way for Bermúdez-style perceptual experiences that are beliefs. Even with the commitment, I take overlap to be compatible with enough theories of nonconceptual content to be worth considering further.

I illustrate the possibility of nonconceptual beliefs with a simple case. Start with some nonconceptual perceptual experience. Etel perceives Mount Tamalpais, with its unique shape and colors. Call that particular shape "SHAPE", and the particular colors "COLORS". Given her experience, Etel has access to content referring to SHAPE and COLORS. It seems to me that, under normal circumstances, she can use this content in action and reasoning. Say she wants to paint Mount Tamalpais. While focusing on COLORS, she can reason about which shades of grey to mix. She can keep looking at SHAPE while guiding

⁸ Toribio, 2008; Bermúdez, 2007. For a reply, see Duhau, 2011.

her hand to capture the form of the mountain. Note that Etel is being led by the highly specific content about COLORS and SHAPE, for neither of which she (presumably) has a concept. Even though her experience has nonconceptual content, it still functions in a belief-like fashion. Thus, I suggest, Etel has a nonconceptual belief.

We can make sense of the situation without invoking overlap⁹, but overlap seems a plausible hypothesis. At the very least, we need a clear reason against the idea before this proposal is rejected.

I consider two objections. The first is that nonconceptual content is unsuitable for inference or being a reason for action. The common claim is that we cannot understand nonconceptual content in the right way (McDowell 1996, Brewer 1999, Sedivy 1996). This is problematic, since the proposal requires perception to be a suitable basis for new beliefs and actions.

The problem with this move is that it proves too much. An important desideratum for any theory of perception is that perception can, to some degree, act as a reason. For instance, I might believe that Bill is a murderer because I saw him stab multiple people. My perceptual experience of Bill stabbing is the reason for my belief that he is a murderer. Any theory of perception should allow for this. If nonconceptual content cannot act as a reason, we should simply deny that perception has nonconceptual content to begin with. The result would be that perception is conceptual. The only other alternative is to deny that perception has rational import, but that strikes me as unappealing.¹⁰ Either nonconceptual content can serve as a basis for new beliefs and actions, or it cannot. If it cannot, we should say perception is conceptual. If it can, there is no threat to my proposal. Either outcome is compatible with overlap.

A second, more complicated objection concerns the maintenance of Etel's beliefs concerning Tamalpais. The content of her belief is provided by her experience. But when she looks away, the experience ends. Yet, several of her beliefs regarding Tamalpais remain. We need a story about how this is possible.

I take a simple line. When Etel looks away, she loses her beliefs about SHAPE and COLORS. Without perception, all she has is her cognition, and that cannot provide her with content containing SHAPE. Perhaps her imagination can, but I will ignore that option here.¹¹

⁹ One might claim that Etel is being guided by demonstrative thoughts for example. See McDowell, 2006.

¹⁰ Though some do accept it. See Burge, 2003; Block, 2023.

¹¹ Some have claimed that there is nonconceptual imagination. See McGinn, 2004. For a discussion, see Arcangeli, 2020.

What happens next is that Etel gains a regular conceptual belief. The content of that belief is presumably provided by her memory. Based on what she saw, some content was stored.¹² With perception gone, she relies on that instead.

Of course, this new belief is much sparser. Before, Etel had the detailed belief that Tamalpais has COLOR. Now, she only believes that it is dark grey, or some other color she has a concept of.

This difference between the original and the new belief strikes me as the right result. While she perceives Tamalpais, Etel is aware of its rich features and can use this awareness to make decisions and form new beliefs. When she looks away, she relies on memory instead. Though this allows her to think about Tamalpais, it is sparser. Still, this allows us to explain how Etel, after looking away, can continue having beliefs about Tamalpais.

1.4

A final controversial consequence of overlap is that some beliefs have a rich phenomenology. Perceptual experiences turned belief retain their phenomenology, meaning some beliefs will have a rich perception-style phenomenology. While this phenomenology makes these beliefs different from more traditional beliefs, there is nothing about phenomenology that would prevent these states from functioning in a belief-like fashion.

Besides, a rich phenomenology for some beliefs should be unsurprising given the findings of the previous section. Phenomenology is often closely tied to content (Dretske 1995; Tye 2008). Hence, we should expect beliefs with nonconceptual content to feel different phenomenologically. A state with rich nonconceptual content will have a rich phenomenological feel. Note that overlap does not necessarily commit us to such a view of phenomenology. It might be that we still need content-independent qualia or sensations of some sort (Shoemaker 1996; Block 2010). However, the link between phenomenology and nonconceptual content can help soothe the worry about richness.

That said, I am not committed to cognitive phenomenology¹³, nor the idea that beliefs, all by themselves, feel like anything. I am merely claiming that when perception becomes belief, those beliefs will include some phenomenological elements since they are also perceptual experiences. These elements arise from the state being an experience, and not from being a belief.

¹² Note that I remain agnostic about how information storage works. For a detailed discussion, see Bernecker, 2010. It is also possible that memorial content is not straightforwardly conceptual, especially short-term memory. Though this does change the details, the main line I take here remains standing. For example, see Sant'Anna, 2020.

¹³ For a defense of cognitive phenomenology, see Pitt, 2004. For a critique, see Prinz, 2011.

II Overlap: An Epistemic Use

Assuming overlap between belief and perceptual experience is a theoretical possibility, what are the benefits of positing it? First, there is something phenomenally apt about it. When I look around, it does not feel like I am constantly producing new mental states on top of my experiences. It is more natural to say that I accept my experiences, rather than copy their contents in separate states. Of course, the phenomenal feel of perceptual beliefs could be explained away. Still, this minor benefit is worth picking up when easily available.

Overlap also has epistemic benefits. I show this by discussing two problems introduced by Byrne (2016; 2021) and Glüer (2009; 2012). They argue that the standard view that perceptual experiences are separate from beliefs leads to epistemically unfortunate results. Embracing overlap can avoid such results. What is more, overlap is less demanding compared to Byrne and Glüer's solution. To those moved by Byrne and Glüer's arguments, overlap is a cheaper alternative.

II.1

Byrne's worry is that, on the standard view, experience is epistemically useless. He points to Block's (1995) superblindsighter to motivate his worry. The superblindsighter's sub-personal processing does not produce typical perceptual experiences. Instead, it directly produces a belief in the superblindsighter. Rather than having an experience of seeing an apple, the superblindsighter suddenly believes that there is an apple in front of her. Byrne compares this to people who instinctively know which way is North, or how we know that time is passing. Neither relies on the presence of any kind of experience.

Byrne (2016, pp. 948-951) assumes that the superblindsighter knows that there is an apple. But if the superblindsighter knows, then what is the use of perceptual experience? It seems to mediate between sub-personal processing and our belief system. However, we can drop this mediation without losing knowledge, as the superblindsight case shows. Perception is useless.

Byrne (2016, pp. 962-965) considers and rejects several options for meeting the worry. He argues that the only way out is to treat perceiving as a form of believing. More precisely, perceiving with content p entails believing that p . This resolves the worry because regular subjects and superblindsighters are now in the same boat. Sub-personal processing directly brings about a belief in both cases. For regular subjects, this comes with perceptual phenomenology, but not for the superblindsighter. Since perceiving is believing, the worry that it is a pointless mediator falls away.

Embracing overlap does not force us to go along with Byrne's intuition that superblindsighters have knowledge. However, it can accommodate that intuition without turning perception into a mediator. The purpose of perception is to make content accessible to the subject. Often enough, the subject will automatically embrace the content. In most cases, and perhaps always for animals, perceiving is believing.¹⁴ However, the subject has the chance to resist believing her eyes.

To see that perception with overlap is not a mediator, compare the regular subject with the superblindsighter. The superblindsighter suddenly believes that there is an apple. Since it is occurrent belief, she has access to the content of her belief. Thus, regular perceptual experience and superblindsight perform the same role. Both provide knowledge-constituting access to the subject. As with Byrne's proposal, they are on par. Thus, overlap can solve Byrne's problem.

II.2

Glüer (2009, pp. 304-306) holds that standard views cannot account for perception as reason-giving. Say I have a perceptual experience with content *p*. I then use this experience to justify my belief that *p*. Glüer thinks that this inference is suspicious. In a nutshell, it comes down to inferring *p* from *p*. This inferential schema, which Glüer calls a stuttering inference, is intuitively odd. It also seems an inapt model for perceptual reasoning. Reasoning from perception to belief is not risk-free. However, on the stuttering schema, *p* simply guarantees that *p*.

Glüer's (2009, pp. 321-325) proposal is to treat perceiving as believing. To perceive with content *p* is to believe that *p*. However, perception always has phenomenal content. Rather than having the content *the tomato is red*, perception has contents like *the tomato looks red*. All forms of perceptual experience have this X looks F format. The inference from *this tomato looks red* to *this tomato is red* is defeasible, and is not intuitively dubious. Thus, stuttering inferences can be avoided.

Overlap can also prevent stuttering inferences. This is not because perception has phenomenal content. Rather, it is because perception with content *p* is not a reason to believe *p*. It makes *p* accessible to the subject to believe instead. Perceiving with content *p* can still be a reason for other beliefs, such as *q*. For example, if I see Bill stab somebody, my experience is a reason to consider Bill a murderer. This limits the rational role perception can play, but does not remove it.

¹⁴ For similar ideas, see Lyons, 2005; Quilty-Dunn, 2015.

This sounds like a radical departure from many modern theories of perceptual justification, but it is less radical than it first appears. Most theories hold that when experience either causes or forms the basis for a belief in the right kind of way¹⁵, the resulting belief is justified because of this tie to an experience. The main point of contention is what it is about experience that gives it the epistemic ability to justify beliefs. For example, reliabilists think that beliefs caused by experiences tend towards the truth in a reliable way (Goldman 2008), while phenomenal conservatives hold that the phenomenal features of experience justify beliefs (Pryor 2005; Chudnoff 2012; Huemer 2007). So while both camps agree that experiences bring about beliefs, they disagree on how exactly this leads to justification. We might call this latter feature of experience, to justify beliefs, its justifying power.

Overlap moves away from this picture in the sense that experiences do not bring about beliefs, they are beliefs. However, it seems that what gives experiences their justifying powers can also make the experiences themselves justified.

Take reliabilist theories about perceptual experiences. Experiences have justifying powers because beliefs brought about by experiences tend to be true. This method of belief-formation is reliable, and hence the resulting beliefs are justified.

With overlap, the experience is the belief, rather than merely bringing it about. If it is true that beliefs brought about by experience tend to be true, it would make sense to claim that experiences themselves also tend to be true. It would be surprising if experiences were mostly false, but would bring about mostly true beliefs. But if that is right, then turning your experiences into beliefs is also a reliable process. An experience turned belief is justified on the reliabilist picture, for basically the same reason they think experiences have justifying powers.

This trick can be repeated for most modern theories of perceptual justification. Take phenomenal conservatism. If phenomenology makes it so that beliefs brought about by experience are justified, it seems plausible to say that phenomenology can also make the experience itself justified once embraced or endorsed. For example, consider Elijah Chudnoff's (2012, pp. 64-65) theory that some kinds of phenomenology constitute an awareness of truth makers. Because my experience involves an awareness of truth makers, a belief brought about by it is justified. But if a token experience *x* can become a belief, why not say that *x* is justified because of that same awareness of truth makers? Nothing about phenomenology or awareness of truth makers seems to prevent this kind

¹⁵ "the right kind of way" is meant to exclude basings or causings that are clearly epistemically faulty. For example, if I base my belief in Bigfoot on something blurry I once saw in the woods, my belief is not justified.

of move. Such a move seems available to any phenomenal conservative friendly to overlap.

As a final example, theories that hold that perceptual justification involves meta-beliefs can also be accommodated. For instance, a meta-belief that perception is reliable can justify a belief brought about by experience, but can obviously also justify the experience itself.¹⁶

I won't go into the details of any other theories of perceptual justification, but I take it the above generalizes. Features like being the result of proper functioning (Plantinga 1993), the proper use of competence (Sosa 2009) or capacities (Schellenberg 2013), being knowledge (producing) (Williams 2000; Byrne 2016) and so on can both confer justifying powers and, if the feature is possessed by a belief, make that belief justified itself. There just isn't any clear reason why a belief must be brought about by, rather than be identical with, experience in order to be perceptually justified. While the idea that experiences can be beliefs has consequences for the epistemology of perception, it is much less radical than it first seems. Most extant theories of perceptual justification are, with some modest modifications, compatible with overlap.

One final comment before moving on, about a broadly Sellarsian worry in the background. Again, the traditional idea is that beliefs brought about in the right way by experiences are justified. One reason for this is the hope that perception can terminate the chain of justification. Experience itself need not be justified, but it can justify further beliefs. These justified beliefs can justify further beliefs, which can justify even further beliefs, and so on. In this way, the idea goes, it can be fully explained how a large set of beliefs can be justified.

The worry is that this only works if experience itself need not be justified (Sellars 1956). Otherwise, it cannot terminate the chain of justification, since some source of justification for experiences must then be found. As Lyons (2009, ch. 3) points out, introducing overlap creates a need for at least some perceptual experiences to be justified. After all, beliefs clearly always require justification. While Lyons thinks the trouble can be solved for externalist theories, he thinks internalist theories fail in this regard. Overlap thus dashes the hopes of perception terminating the chain of justification, at least for internalists.

The reply is that, despite appearances, overlap does not worsen or improve the situation Sellars and Lyons put us in. I grant that the arguments of Sellars and Lyons, which I will

¹⁶ For something in that direction, see White, 2006; Cohen, 2010. For other required meta-beliefs, see McGrath, 2017; 2018.

not discuss in detail here, put pressure on internalists. But this is true regardless of overlap. All overlap does is to shift the goal from explaining how perception justifies belief to how perception itself becomes justified. No matter what, any theory of perceptual justification needs a story as to why perception has a special epistemic status. What the previous few pages have shown, to my mind, is that in practical terms, it does not matter whether that status is about perception being justified or about how perception gains justifying powers. Most modern theories will work equally well for both purposes. Thus, the arguments of Sellars and Lyons put the same amount of pressure on internalists, regardless of which exact epistemic status they try to assign to perception. Overlap does not increase, or lighten, their plight.

As for terminating the chain of justification, this can still be done. Take phenomenal conservatism, which is generally considered an internalist theory. With overlap, some perceptual experiences are justified because of their phenomenology. The special phenomenology of perception does not require further justification, a result overlap does not seem to interfere with. Of course, it is possible that phenomenal conservatism is wrong, and cannot terminate the chain of justification for that reason. But overlap itself should not be an obstacle.

II.3

Ultimately, both overlap and the solutions proposed by Byrne and Glüer can prevent mediation and stuttering. However, overlap is less costly. Let us start with Byrne's account. Intuitively, there are cases where subjects do not believe what they perceive. Say Robin is lost in the desert. Suddenly, he sees a huge and lush palace. The palace is really there. However, Robin thinks that he is hallucinating. Hence, Robin does not believe that there is a palace. This simple case is troublesome on the Byrne view. He must insist that Robin believes that there is a palace, even though that is not plausible.

Byrne's proposal is that Robin truly believes that the palace is there, but that the belief is suppressed. The idea is that Robin is strongly inclined to believe the palace to be there, but that this belief is "held in check" (Byrne 2016, p. 963) by his stronger belief that he is hallucinating.

The reply is that we should not be so hasty to give up the distinction between being inclined to believe and to believe. As indicated earlier, performing certain key functions seems essential to being a belief. These key functions include impacting behavior and further belief-formation. A suppressed belief is in no position to do so.

Besides, it seems to me that there could be agents who can perceive without even the inclination to believe their eyes. Imagine some hyperrationalist creature that only believes its eyes when its experiences align with its current beliefs. When an

experience fails to do so, the creature is not even inclined to believe. This is probably not how it works for most creatures, but there is nothing incoherent about the picture. Byrne must reject the possibility, but there is no obvious way to do so that is not *ad hoc*.¹⁷

Glüer is in better shape than Byrne when it comes to Robin and the palace. However, the case still makes trouble for her. Recall that on Glüer's (2009, p. 311) account, when Robin perceives the palace, he has a belief with the content *the desert looks like it has a palace in it*. Glüer makes it quite explicit that the desert itself is meant to look a certain way. A phenomenal property (looking like it has a palace) is ascribed to a material object (the desert). The trouble is that Robin would not believe this. The desert itself, he thinks, just looks like a desert. It is only due to his current physical and mental circumstances that it seems to Robin that there is a palace. But that is not due to anything about the desert, so Robin would not ascribe any particular phenomenal property to it.

Compare this to the bent stick illusion. In that case, there really is something about the stick that makes it look bent. Namely, it being placed in the water, with light refracting in a surprising way. It then makes sense to attribute a phenomenal property to the stick. But such a move seems mistaken in cases of suspected hallucination.

Even if the above is wrong, a minor adaption can make the case of Robin and the palace more troublesome for Glüer. What if Robin thinks, due to confusion rising from thirst, that his eyes are closed? Unbeknownst to him, his eyes are open and he sees a palace in the desert in front of him. Robin concludes that he is hallucinating with his eyes closed. Surely, in such circumstances, Robin would not believe that the desert looks like it has a palace in it. After all, he thinks his eyes are closed and that he is not observing the desert at all. His current experiences, he thinks, tell him nothing about what the world looks like. To ascribe a belief about the desert itself looking a certain way to Robin seems wrong.

Overlap avoids all these problems. Perceptual experiences sometimes, perhaps even often, turn into beliefs. However, they do not always. Robin's experience is one of the exceptions. Even though he perceives a palace in the desert, he does not believe it to be there. He need not even believe that the desert looks like it has a palace in it. Overlap is a cheaper alternative for those who are moved by Byrne and Glüer's arguments.

Conclusion

¹⁷ A more elaborate reply to the problem is given by Quilty-Dunn, though it still ultimately fails. Quilty-Dunn, 2015.

Perceptual experiences, in typical cases, provide access to content. If that content is endorsed or embraced, the experience turns into a belief. As such, a singular mental token can be multiple types at once. This requires some restructuring of how we talk about believing and perceiving, but not as much as one would initially expect. Accepting overlap has some pleasant benefits, including ameliorating certain epistemic issues. Of course, more digging lies ahead. But overlap seems to be a useful tool for the philosopher's toolbox.

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