Two phenomenological constraints on object-seeing

Perception provides a primitive form of contact with the world and the other people in it. For example, one can learn that Franco is sitting in his chair by seeing Franco; we can learn that his hair is gray by seeing the color of his hair. Such perception enables us to understand primitive forms of language, such as demonstrative expressions “this” and “that”. These are expressions we can readily use to talk about the particular things we perceive.

Given its apparently fundamental role in knowledge and understanding, it is natural to wonder what the nature of perceptual access to the world is. Which aspects of perception contribute to our representation of particulars? I will focus on the case of seeing ordinary objects--people, horses, trains and the like, and I’ll call this kind of seeing “object-seeing”. So while I’ll be talking quite a bit about seeing Franco, I won’t talk at all about seeing the color of Franco’s hair. I will argue that visual phenomenology has a role to play in object-seeing that is overlooked in some influential discussions. It is hardly controversial that seeing has a visual phenomenology. What’s more controversial is its role in making an experience an experience of seeing (say) Franco, rather than someone or something else.¹ Most philosophers deny that the phenomenology of seeing Franco is in any way constituted by Franco

¹ For extensive discussion, thanks to Bernard Nickel, David Chalmers, Maja Spener and Scott Sturgeon.

¹ One issue here is whether the functional zombie-twin of someone who sees Franco would see Franco as well, assuming that functional zombies are conceivable. My functional zombie twin would be someone who is just like me in all functional respects, but lacks all phenomenology. I’m going to assume that if functional zombies are conceivable, they wouldn’t see in the same sense as (I’m assuming) we do. This is in effect to stipulate that there is a kind of seeing for which phenomenology is essential. The substantive question is then what role, if any, the phenomenology plays in making an experience an experience of seeing a particular object o, rather than another object. Whether there is
himself.\(^2\) One could have an experience with the same phenomenology, they hold, even if Franco didn’t exist. Some go further, and hold that in general it doesn’t matter for object-seeing what sort of phenomenology object-seeing has; all that matters is how that phenomenology would change with changes in the object seen. A pure counterfactual analysis, they say, can reveal the nature of the object-seeing relation.

Though I won’t be offering a complete account of what makes a visual experience connect to a particular object, I hope to make some progress on this front by arguing that there are two phenomenological constraints on object-seeing.

The discussion will proceed as follows. After introducing the notion of object-seeing in section 1, I criticize what I call “pure causal theories” in section 2. In sections 3 and 4, I introduce the two phenomenological constraints on object-seeing.

1. What is object-seeing?

There are two kinds of experiences that are arguably kinds of seeing, but that I will ignore in my discussion. The first is blindsight. In blindsight, although there does not seem to the subject to be anything in her visual field, if forced to guess between certain parameters (e.g., which way a line is oriented), subjects guess correctly more than half the time.\(^3\) Blindsight does not seem to me to be sight; even if it is, I will not be discussing it.

The second kind of experience is probably familiar. Suppose you open the

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\(^2\) The alternative is disjunctivism. Disjunctivism denies that the most basic fact about visual experiences is any common factor between genuine perceptions and events subjectively indistinguishable from them, in favor of the idea that the most basic fact about every experience is that it is either genuine perception, or it is not. This view was introduced by J. M. Hinton, “Visual Experiences”, *Mind* 76, 1967, 217-27.

refrigerator to look for the mustard. You take yourself not to have seen it. Then you open the refrigerator again, and there’s the mustard, right in front of you. One thing that could have happened the first time you opened the refrigerator is that you saw the mustard, but didn’t recognize it as the mustard, because you mistook it for something else. But another thing that could have happened is that the mustard jar just didn’t register with you at all. Some would want to describe this as a case of seeing the mustard jar without noticing it. (This is how Fred Dretske describes a similar case.\(^4\)) Favoring Dretske’s description, on which you see the mustard jar without noticing it, is the following idea: if you are looking in direction D, o is a visible distance from you in direction D, and your visual system is working properly under external conditions that are generally conducive to seeing, then you will see o.

This idea, however, is controversial. It is not obvious whether, on that occasion, that mustard jar appears some way to you.\(^5\) Rather than rule one way or another on mustard-jar-type cases, in what follows I will ignore the kinds of seeing and appearing, if such there be, that occur in those cases.

The positive characterization of object-seeing comes from its role in anchoring de re attitudes to particulars that they are directly about.\(^6\) These propositional attitudes are ones we invoke cases of seeing objects to explain. Let me indicate which propositional attitudes I mean by drawing a familiar contrast. Some propositional

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\(^4\) See Dretske’s example of the cufflink in *Seeing and Knowing* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986).

\(^5\) E.g., G. Warnock’s view (in the 1963 postscript to “Seeing,” in *Perceiving, Sensing and Knowing*, ed. R. Swartz [1954], New York: Doubleley, 66-7), would allow that you can see the mustard jar even if it doesn’t register. According to it, an instance of S sees o can be true even when S does not recognize or identify “any visual phenomenon as an object,” so long as S has the capacity to identify visual phenomena as objects. Thus Warnock denies that S will see o only when S (right then) has a visual experience in which o appears some way to S (where this requires that one identify a visual phenomenon as an object).

attitudes are not directly about any particular object at all. The newspapers report an influx of barnacles, and say that no boat will be spared. The editor thinks to herself, “Even the fastest boat is covered with barnacles.” She does not form this belief by figuring out which boat is fastest, and then determining that it is so covered. She has no interest in which boat this is.

In contrast, other propositional attitudes are directly about particular objects: for instance, Franco’s belief, of the boat he saw, that it is covered with barnacles. Franco’s belief is a canonical instance of beliefs that are directly about particular objects. It is formed from his having a simple perceptual relation to the boat, for instance by his seeing it. It is the kind of belief that could naturally be expressed by using a demonstrative expression, as in “That is a boat”.

As it happens, ordinary language reports of the form $S$ sees $o$ are not always reports of the sort of object-seeing at issue. Franco and Ray go down to the docks and stand by a boat wrapped tightly in a tarp, which someone tells them is the renowned Lady Windermere, fastest boat on water. Later on, someone asks Franco what color the Lady Windermere is, and he answers, “I don’t know, I didn’t actually see her.” If the boat is white and Franco said “The boat is white, I saw her”, what he said would not be entirely true. Now consider a counterfactual situation in which someone asks if anyone knows whether the Lady has anchored yet, and Franco says “She has: I saw her down by the dock earlier today.” Arguably, Franco speaks truly both times. And if he speaks truly both times, then the truth of reports of the form $S$ sees $o$ does not depend only on facts about $o$, the speaker’s perceptual workings, and external conditions, since these factors are held constant in the two scenarios. So even if Franco speaks truly when he says, of the Lady Windermere, “I didn’t see her,” he might still stand in the object-seeing relation to the boat.
I’ve said that playing a role in anchoring de re mental states to their objects provides a positive characterization of object-seeing. I don’t mean by this that an experience’s playing such a role with respect to any de re mental state is sufficient for the experience to be a case of seeing the object that the perceptually-anchored de re belief is about. One might form a de re belief about the house one is standing in on the strength of seeing only the basement, which seems not to suffice for seeing the house. One can arguably form a de re belief about a jet by seeing only the vapor stream it is leaving behind, and yet seeing only the vapor stream--without so much as a grey speck at the moving end--does not seem to suffice for seeing the jet. In general, a subject can form a de re belief about o on the strength of perception, without perceiving o. But if one does see o, and one has the requisite cognitive apparatus, one can form a de re mental state about o on the strength of seeing it.7

I now turn to pure causal theories of object-seeing.

2. Pure causal theories object-seeing

Object-seeing is a relation between a perceiver and an object that holds exactly when the perceiver sees the object. Take Sam and Franco. How must they be related, if Sam is to see Franco?

Here is one answer: Sam sees Franco just in case Franco looks some way to Sam. This answer is not very informative. A more informative answer would give exhaustive constraints on object-seeing--that is, necessary and sufficient conditions under which the relation holds--that don’t invoke the notion of Sam’s seeing anything, or of Franco’s appearing any way to Sam.

7 The role of object-seeing in forming other de re mental states is meant merely to illustrate the phenomenon. A creature could see objects, even if it lacked the cognitive equipment needed to form de
H. P. Grice argued that to be seen, objects must causally influence the perceiver’s visual phenomenology. For Sam to see Franco, on this view, Franco must have some effect on Sam’s visual phenomenology. This isn’t the same as the condition that Franco must visually appear to Sam, since something can cause Sam’s visual phenomenology—e.g., a drug—without visually appearing any way to Sam at all.

Grice went on to add that given (what he took to be) the necessary condition of causal influence on visual phenomenology, sufficient conditions for object-seeing were not far off. So long as some visual phenomenology is produced in S by o, Grice thought, it would suffice for S to see o that o stand in a kind of causal relation to S’s visual phenomenology that obtains in paradigm cases of object-seeing. On this view, the kind of causal relation holding between Franco and Sam’s visual phenomenology suffices for object-seeing. Grice put the point like this:

> [f]or an object to be perceived by X, it is sufficient that it should be causally involved in the generation of some sense-impression had by X in the kind of way in which, for example, when I look at my hand in a good light, my hand is causally responsible for its looking to me as if there were a hand before me, or in which…(and so on), whatever that kind of way may be; and to be enlightened on that question, one must have recourse to the specialist.8

What Grice calls a “sense-impression” is what I’ve been calling “visual phenomenology”. Leaving aside for the moment Grice’s last remark about the

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specialist, the purportedly sufficient condition for a perceiver S to see an object o that Grice alludes to is that the kind of causal relation that obtains in paradigmatic cases of object-seeing should obtain between S and o.

Grice speaks of the kind of causal relation that obtains in a paradigmatic case of object-seeing, but there are bound to be multiple kinds instantiated by this causal relation that differ in their extension. For instance, one kind might be individuated by the specific neurological visual processing system had by S in the paradigmatic case, whereas a relatively more general kind might abstract away from this system, focusing on the functional roles that the neural processes play. These are two kinds of processes, both realized physically (the first is essentially physical, the second is not). At a yet more general level, there might be a kind individuated merely by a pattern of counterfactual dependence between states of o and S’s visual phenomenology in the paradigmatic case, without any restrictions on the sort of process, physical or otherwise, by which these changes in phenomenology are effected.9

Assuming that there really is a kind of causal relation that suffices for an arbitrary perceiver S to see an object o, it is an open question whether this condition also fixes the extension of S sees o. Is the kind of causal relation that obtains between S and o in a paradigmatic case of object-seeing instantiated whenever S sees o?

The modest answer is that the condition is merely sufficient, and does not fix the extension of S sees o. According to the modest answer, there will be cases of object-seeing that do not instantiate the kind of causal relation present in a paradigmatic case of seeing, though they do instantiate some other kind. Grice

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9 I’ve spoken of the counterfactual dependence as a kind of causal relation. One might hold that any case in which the visual phenomenology of a subject S counterfactually depends in the right way on states of o suffices for S to see o, yet deny that causation is any kind of counterfactual dependence. I’ll continue to speak of counterfactual dependence as a kind of causal relation, but this is only for the sake of simplicity.
himself seems to have thought that the kind of causal relation at issue was specific enough to S’s biological properties that it would take a “specialist”, as opposed to a philosopher, to specify the kind of causal relation in question. A more robust claim is that the sufficient condition that S’s visual phenomenology stand in the kind of causal relation to o instantiated in the paradigmatic case is also necessary, and so fixes the extension of \( S \text{ sees } o \).

According to one interpretation of Grice, in either the modest or the robust version, it is supposed to suffice that what is caused in S be merely some sense-impression (or equivalently, some visual phenomenology) or other. Aside from the causal condition, no further constraint on the sort of visual phenomenology is proposed. The assumption that no further phenomenological constraint is needed is made explicitly by Michael Tye, who offers a causal analysis of \( S \text{ sees } o \). In Tye’s proposal, all that is required of visual phenomenology is that it systematically co-vary with certain changes in the object seen.\(^{10}\)

Let a “pure causal theory of seeing” be any theory according to which it is sufficient for S to see o that S have some visual phenomenology that causally or counterfactually depends on o, and no further constraints on S’s visual phenomenology are needed. Tye offers one such theory, and on one interpretation Grice does too (I’ll introduce a different interpretation shortly). Note that this

\(^{10}\)Tye’s proposal goes as follows. Where \( M \)-properties are properties representable in visual experience,
\( P \text{ sees } x = df. \) (i) There is a causal chain of events C which ends with P’s having an experience of a visual sensum S; (ii) within C some event involving P’s eyes causally intervenes between some event involving x and p’s experiencing S; (iii) x’s position in C is such that it is in principle possible to vary each M-property of x…and thereby produce a systematic variation in the corresponding spatial property of S, assuming all other factors are either (a) held fixed, if leaving them alone would result in…significant differences between the way in which x brings about S is C originally and the way in which x brings about S as the M-properties of x…are varied, or (b) left alone, if leaving them alone would not have that result.

characterization of them leaves open whether the theory purports to offer merely sufficient conditions for object-seeing, or whether it purports to fix the extension of S sees o.

Such theories of object-seeing overlook a way in which visual phenomenology itself constrains the object-seeing relation. That there is such a constraint is shown by the following case.

Franco in the sky: S is looking through the window of a skyscraper and seems to see nothing but a uniform bright blue expanse. S’s experience is at least partly veridical.\(^1\) Franco’s body is painted so its surfaces look to S to be the exact shade of blue as the sky looks, and he is suspended from invisible string in S’s line of sight as she looks through the window. Although Franco is not part of the uniform expanse of bright blue light, the part of the scene before S’s eyes where Franco is located appears to be part of such a uniformly bright blue expanse.

In this case, even though S is looking straight at him, S does not see Franco. Perhaps S sees Franco’s disguised surfaces. But S is not in a position to form a de re belief about Franco on the strength of her visual experience. So S does not see Franco in the sense that matters, given the theoretical purpose of our notion of object-seeing.

Franco, in this case, is like a chameleon: he blends in with his surroundings to the point where he is, to S, indistinguishable from them. Perhaps if Franco were

\(^1\) Arguably, the experience’s content is neutral on whether or not there is anything else in sky, and the experience is totally veridical. Although one might say the experience is merely partly veridical on the grounds that it falsidically represents Franco’s absence, it seems implausible to suppose that Franco’s absence is represented in experience, if the subject has not first been primed to see Franco in the sky, and nothing about the case requires that. In any case, whether the experience is totally or only partly
painted a different color, or if he moved around instead of hanging still, he probably would bring about a change in S’s visual phenomenology, and S would be able to see him. But the fact remains: S does not see him in the world in which he is painted blue and hangs still.

There seems to be a phenomenological constraint on seeing Franco that Sam’s experience as of a uniform blue expanse fails to meet. What seems to be missing is that S cannot, on the strength of her visual experience, differentiate Franco from his immediate surroundings. Call this the Differentiation condition on object-seeing.\footnote{Dretske argues for the necessity of a similar condition on object-seeing in \textit{Seeing and Knowing}.}

\begin{quote}
Differentiation condition: If S sees o, then S visually differentiates o from its immediate surroundings.
\end{quote}

It might be claimed that the Differentiation condition could be met by fixing on the right sort of causal relation, and so no additional phenomenological constraint on object-seeing is needed after all. But causal relations at all three levels of generality considered earlier seem to obtain in the case of Franco in the sky.

Consider first any pattern of counterfactual dependence of S’s visual phenomenology on changes in Franco. Just what sort of counterfactual dependence is supposed to suffice for object-seeing is a bit hard to pin down. The pattern should not predict \textit{self-intimation}, where every change in an object o is registered by a change in phenomenology, since that would undergenerate, leaving out cases of object-seeing where some change in the object seen goes un-noticed (even a change in visible properties). Nor should it predict \textit{infallibility} on the part of S’s visual experience.

\footnote{Veridical is inessential to the objection against pure causal theories.}
such that every change in phenomenology accurately reflects whether there has been a change (of any sort) in o, let alone accurately reflecting what the change is. That too would undergenerate, since there are cases of object-seeing where the subject’s visual experience mistakenly represents that the object seen has changed in some way.

But assume that there is some sort of counterfactual dependence that is not as strong as either of these. The reason to think it obtains in the Franco case is that the camoflage is very fragile. It leaves intact the sensitivity of S’s visual phenomenology to changes in Franco. The slightest change in Franco’s color or motionlessness would disrupt it. Contrast a camoflage that worked by partial occlusion, such as a bird’s blending in with foliage of the same color as its body. The subject’s visual phenomenology would not be sensitive to changes in the parts of the bird occluded by the leaves. In contrast, it is exclusively the fault of Franco’s surroundings—not of the link between him and S’s’ visual phenomenology—that S cannot see him.\footnote{It might be suggested that when S faces Franco in the sky, S sees Franco without noticing him, so that the case is analogous to the situation with the mustard jar described in section 1. The two cases, however, are not analogous. By the description of the case, no matter how much you attend to the sky when Franco is in it, you won’t be able to discern his boundaries. You will be able to discern the}{chapter 1.}

Now consider the physical and functional processes between Franco and S. Unless it is built in to the causal process that it results in experience enabling visual differentiation, these causal processes will be just as they would be, if the sky were slightly lighter so that Franco’s outlines showed through. It might be thought that by expanding the distal relatum to include the immediate surroundings of o, the phenomenological constraint could be made to fall out of the causal constraint, and thus no additional phenomenological constraint is needed. Expanding the distal relatum in this way might indeed result in a sufficient condition for object-seeing, but only if the distal relatum causes the right sort of phenomenology. S’s visual phenomenology would not be sensitive to changes in the parts of the bird occluded by the leaves. In contrast, it is exclusively the fault of Franco’s surroundings—not of the link between him and S’s’ visual phenomenology—that S cannot see him.13

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phenomenology is caused by both Franco and his immediate surroundings in the original case, yet that is not a case of object-seeing. Merely expanding the relatum, while the relation stays the same, will not by itself incorporate the phenomenological constraint into the causal condition.

This brings us to the alternative interpretation of Grice. On the alternative interpretation, the kind of causal relation between o and S’s visual phenomenology that holds in paradigmatic cases of object-seeing is individuated in part by its mind-side relatum. If one stipulates that the relevant causal relation is so individuated, then one recognizes the phenomenological constraint on object-seeing.

One might claim that this is the wrong moral to draw from the Franco case. What’s missing from the Franco case, on this line of thought, is not any special phenomenology, but rather certain dispositions on the part of the perceiver to move in response to the informational inputs to her cognitive system, and in combination with her intentions. For example, in the case of Franco in the sky, even if Sam wants desperately to pat Franco on the back right then, no matter where he is, he will nevertheless not be disposed to take himself into the sky to do it.\textsuperscript{14} It might be thought that in normal cases, if S sees o, then S will be disposed to manipulate her position in space relative to o in accordance with her intentions. Having such dispositions toward objects, on this line of thought, is necessary for seeing them, and they are what is missing in the case of Franco in the sky.

I’ve argued that in the case of Franco in the sky, though many necessary conditions for object-seeing are met, a phenomenological constraint is not, and that the phenomenological condition seems to be all that is missing from the case. The line boundaries of the mustard jar, in contrast, if you look more carefully.

\textsuperscript{14} Assume that Sam is not akratic, and then he would recognize Franco upon seeing him.
of thought sketched above will be an objection to this, only if what is alleged to be
necessary for object-seeing are sensory-motor dispositions that are had irrespective of
whether or not they are grounded in phenomenology that enables visual
differentiation. The strongest version of the objection is thus one that gives reasons to
think that the relevant dispositions may be grounded in something other than in the
phenomenology that enables visual differentiation, such that giving Sam those
dispositions in the Franco case would be enough to make Sam see Franco.

Now, it seems implausible to suppose that having the relevant disposition
grounded in any way other than visual phenomenology would suffice to make Sam
see Franco in the Franco case. Suppose Sam is flying a kite, and discovers by chance
that when it is in a certain area of the sky, it collides with Franco, disturbing the flow
of the kite while leaving Franco’s camouflage intact. After some experimentation, Sam
discovers the exact area in which the kite’s flight is disturbed. If he wants to explore
further the nature of the disturbance, he now knows where he has to go. He thus
seems to acquire the disposition said to be lacking in the original Franco case. Yet
there is little temptation to say that finding out about (what are in fact) the boundaries
of Franco in this way will make Sam see him.

The other possibility is that the dispositions (assuming that they are necessary
for object-seeing) may be grounded in visual phenomenology, but in phenomenology
that stops short of enabling visual differentiation. Such phenomenology would be
quite degraded, on the order of flashes of light.

There is a structural tension in this way of pursuing the objection, however.
The tension is due to the fact that the very dispositions said to be necessary for object-
seeing, if they are grounded in visual phenomenology at all, would seem to have to be
grounded in the kind of visual phenomenology that enables visual differentiation. The
more degraded the phenomenology, then less plausible it is to suppose that it could ground the dispositions said to be necessary for object-seeing. The more suitable the phenomenology is for grounding the dispositions, the more plausible the initial conclusion seems to be.

So there seems to be a phenomenological necessary condition on object-seeing, one that is either built in to causal or counterfactual dependence, or one that holds in addition to any such relations of dependence. Visual phenomenology has to enable the subject to visually differentiate Franco from his surroundings.

What feature of visual phenomenology enables it to perform this function? Call this “feature P”. The conclusion of the discussion so far, then, is this:

\[ (I) \quad S \text{ sees } o \text{ only if } S\text{'s phenomenology has feature } P. \]

It is the phenomenology of S’s experience in the case of Franco in the sky that disqualifies it from being an experience of seeing Franco. In order to enable Sam to differentiate Franco from his surroundings, Sam’s visual experience must have phenomenology of some other sort. This gives us a rudimentary functional characterization of feature P by the role it plays in a subject’s cognitive life. Given an object o--for example, Franco--conclusion (I) tells us that Franco can be seen only by a subject whose visual phenomenology enables her to visually differentiate Franco from his surroundings. But while we have a characterization of P in terms of its role, we don’t have any characterization of what enables it to play that role.

In the next two sections, I will propose that visual phenomenology must have two features in order to have feature P. The first feature is shared by all experiences of object-seeing, as well as by all experiences, notably hallucinations, phenomenally
indistinguishable from such experiences. The second feature is more finely grained, and can be specified only relative to a particular object o.

3. Objecty phenomenology

The first proposal is that phenomenology has feature P only if it is ‘objecty’. When you see something that looks to be an object, your phenomenology is objecty. Is there a way things can look, when they look objecty? As with any aspect of phenomenology, if there is such a look, it’s not easy to give an informative description of it. But here is a situation from which it seems reasonable to infer that there is such a look.

Suppose you see a table with nothing on it except a die in one corner and a top hat in the middle. And suppose that for whatever reason, you’ve never seen dice or top hats before, never read descriptions of them, and have no beliefs at all about what these two things that you are seeing are for. Even in your ignorance about these things, you would still typically know where the table ends and the die and hat each begin. Mistakes about this sort of thing are rare: it’s a trick hat that sticks to the table when you try to pick it up. In fact there is empirical evidence that infants as young as three months don’t treat unfamiliar spatially isolated objects (such as the die and the hat in this example) to be continuations of the surfaces they are on (in this case, the table).

It seems plausible that these responses are guided by the way these things look to you. Similar situations could be imagined with unfamiliar objects that look vastly different from these and from one another with respect to shape, color, texture, and size. Yet in all cases, something about the way each of these things look lets you know where the relevant boundaries are. This seems to be some reason to think that
there is objecty phenomenology.\textsuperscript{15}

It is not in principle impossible to end up with the assessments about which parts of the scene before the eyes belong together as parts of a single object without objecty phenomenology. One could end up with an assessment of this, even with an impoverished visual phenomenology in which the scene before the eyes appeared merely as a layout of colors and shapes, with no salient boundaries indicating where one thing ends and another begin. One would just have to add some other inputs from the cognitive system. But it seems plausible to suppose, on phenomenological grounds, that that it not how it actually happens.

The opponent of objecty phenomenology has two options. First, she can propose that for normal perceivers, it would be apt to describe their phenomenology of seeing the scene mentioned earlier as an array of surfaces and protrusions, rather than as a table, hat and die (or more neutrally described objects). Second, the opponent of objecty phenomenology can take a more skeptical position, holding that we don’t have enough access to our visual phenomenology to know whether or not it is objecty, and hence whether or not such a description would be apt.

The first option is not very plausible. If a subject S sees someone throw a basketball, the opponent of objecty phenomenology must say that nothing in S’s visual phenomenology indicates that the series of momentary presentations of an orange sphere is the movement of a single ball. If the subject is holding a pen in her hand, nothing in her visual phenomenology, the opponent must say, indicates where the hand ends and the pen begins. There may be a level of visual processing carrying information about the scene before the eyes, but at which such distinctions are not

\textsuperscript{15}In suggesting that there is such a thing as objecty phenomenology, I’ve made the case easy by considering spatially isolated objects. I’m counting on something stronger being true, that there is some
made, such as Marr’s 2.5-D sketch. But it is not recognizable as one with a phenomenology.

The second, skeptical option raises complex issues about what sort of information about phenomenology is available from a first-person perspective. At one extreme is the view that everything about phenomenology is accessible from the first-person perspective. At another extreme is the view that nothing about phenomenology is accessible from the first-person perspective. That extreme is implausible, to the extent that some sort of access to phenomenology seems built in to the very notion of phenomenality, even if it does not involve the cognitive equipment needed for introspection proper. If there is some sort of primitive access built in to phenomenology, then states with phenomenology could not be as inaccessible to us from the first-person perspective as other states of visual processing are that lack phenomenology altogether. If that is right, then the opponent of objecty phenomenology must grant that we have some sort of access to our visual phenomenology, while denying that we have enough access to know whether or not it is objecty. It is not clear where this line should be drawn. If there is no reason to draw the line at a place that excludes objecty phenomenology, then this weakens second option for the opponent of objecty phenomenology. What exactly the first-person perspective can reveal about phenomenology, however, is an issue that is far from settled.\textsuperscript{16}

4. A more finely grained phenomenological constraint on object-seeing

Although S’s visual phenomenology must be objecty, for S to see Franco, arguably not just any objecty phenomenology will do. Suppose that Franco is walking down an otherwise empty hallway toward Sam. When Franco is 20 feet away from Sam, Sam sees the hallway, which appears to him to be entirely empty, except for a pair of dice at his feet. Finally, suppose that Sam’s visual phenomenology systematically co-varies with changes in Franco, in a way that avoids both self-intimation and infallibility, as these were defined earlier. This scenario could take pace only in a word where the laws of nature differed from the ones we’re used to.

One implausible consequence of ruling that Sam sees Franco in this case is that Sam could form a de re belief about Franco on the strength of his dicey experience. This consequence seems incorrect. It seems wrong to suppose that Sam so much as ends up with a false de re belief about Franco, to the effect that he is made of plastic, or adds up to eleven. The same intuition seems to hold for one die, rather than a pair.

This case suggests that there is more to feature P than objecty phenomenology per se. Objecty phenomenology is a general constraint, applying to any case of object-seeing. The more specific constraint is relative to an object, say Franco. It is that only a limited range of objecty experiences will be suitable for seeing Franco.

What makes the dicey experience an unsuitable one with which to see Franco? The dicey experience is massively falsidical. Assuming that the experience represents the property of being cubical, of having 5 dots, being shiny and green, and perhaps being a die. None of these are properties that Franco has.

If the dicey experience unsuitable for seeing Franco because it is massively falsidical, then it is natural to suppose that the specific phenomenological constraint is
equivalent to some correctness condition on the contents of experiences. One version would go like this. An experience is suitable for seeing o, only if at least some of its contents are correct with respect to o. For instance, the experiences suitable for seeing Franco would be the ones that represent Franco as having some properties that Franco in fact has.

Though this suggestion is a natural one to make, the specific constraint on object-seeing cannot be pinned down in this way. Object-seeing survives some sorts of massive falsidicality. Seen from a distance, your house may look like a dot, without sharp edges. But in fact its edges are straight. You don’t live in a white dot. It does not seem to spoil the fact that you’re seeing it if you perceptually misrepresent not only its edges, but also its color and location. Sometimes combining air masses of different densities can result in such illusions, analogous to the ones that result when you look at fish through water. In such a case, your house could appear to be farther away than it is, and a little bit east of where it is, but neither of these mistakes would prevent you from seeing it.

(One point of clarification is in order. The house certainly does appear to S to be “over there,” as S might put it if she were describing how things look. The house has the property of appearing to be at a certain location. But this fact does not help any of the descriptivist proposals. What experience (incorrectly) represents is the property of being located at a certain place, not the property of appearing to be located there. In characterizing how the house appears, we want something of the form “it appears to S as if…,” where the ellipsis is filled in with a characterization of

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17 It is important to imagine the case properly, so that the experience is an illusion of contours, not simply indeterminate with respect to the exact contours it represents the house as having.
18 Alvin Goldman in “Perceptual Objects” (Synthese 35, 1977, 257-89) goes even farther: he says, “Glimpsing an object briefly, your perception of it may be wholly false” (258).
the properties experience represents. In the kinds of illusions under discussion, it is not part of what perceptual experience “tells” the subject that things merely appear to be located where they are. So the ellipsis can’t be filled in with anything that includes the property of appearing. It won’t work, then, to appeal to the property of appearing to be over there, although your house certainly has this property.)

It may be that in any case of object-seeing, there will be at least some very general property that will be represented in experience, and that the object seen will have. Examples might be the property of being extended, or of being an object (whatever that property is). It might then be thought that the specific constraint is this: an experience with objecty phenomenology is suitable for seeing o, if the experience represents the general property F and o has F. But this does not help pin down the specific constraint either. The dicey experience presumably represents the properties of being extended and being an object (if any experience does), and Franco has these properties, but the dicey experience is not suitable for seeing Franco. More generally, representing general properties does not distinguish between the content associated with objecty phenomenology that falls within the range allowed by the finely grained constraint on seeing Franco, and the objecty phenomenology falling outside that range.

It seems that the finely grained constraint, then, is not a straightforward correctness condition on content, where experience represents a property the object seen has. This leaves us in need of some way to pin down the constraint that rules out massively falsidical experiences, yet without going so far as to require experiences having correct content. I will leave it an open question what sort of relation between phenomenology and an object has this feature, but I will end by mentioning two avenues that might be pursued.
First, perhaps the relation underlying the specific constraint is a relation of resemblance between the properties represented in experience have to resemble the properties had by the object seen. For instance, perhaps S’s seeing the house is impervious to the falsidicality of her experience, because that experience represents size and contour properties that resemble in the relevant respects the size and contours of the house and its surroundings. The challenge for this approach is to specify the respects of resemblance that matter. One could go part way to pinning down these respects by appealing to the maximally indeterminate experiences that count as an experience of seeing the house. Such indeterminate experiences will leave open a range of properties that the house can have, consistent with the veridicality of the experience. Then any experience that determinately represents the properties in this range can count as an experience of seeing the house. The properties represented by experience will resemble the properties of the house in the right respects, just in case they are properties that the house can have, consistent with the veridicality of a maximally indeterminate experience of seeing the house. This is not a complete approach, since takes as understood which maximally indeterminate experiences are experiences of a seeing the house. But it is a start.

Second, perhaps the intuition that the dicey experience is unsuitable for seeing Franco reflects the fact that there is no causal process to which we are accustomed that results in massive falsidicality of that sort. In that case, the intuition is equally about phenomenological and causal constraints on object-seeing. To pin down the finely-grained constraint using this approach, what would be needed is a further specification of the causal processes that have the right phenomenological endpoints.

Both of these approaches seem plausible. If they are pursued further, they may pin down the more fine-grained constraint on object-seeing.