To block the argument from hallucination, some naïve realists accommodate the eliminativist claim that hallucinations do not have visual phenomenology. It is, however, little known that the eliminativist claim also confers an ontological advantage on naïve realism. Taking into account the ontological advantage, I will argue, naïve realism can best address the explanatory gap problem.

Keywords: Naïve Realism, Explanatory Gap, Phenomenal Character,

Introduction: Eliminativistic Naïve Realism

Naïve realism is a philosophical position about the phenomenology of veridical visual experience. It can be characterized as the conjunction of two claims, one explanatory and one metaphysical. The explanatory claim is that a veridical visual experience has phenomenology in virtue of the subject’s perceiving environmental objects, rather than his visual system representing such objects or his sensing private mental entities. An experience has phenomenology if and only if there is something it is like to have the experience. This explanatory claim does not say anything about the metaphysics of visual phenomenology. Given this, naïve realists are led to add the metaphysical claim that the phenomenology of veridical visual experience is wholly constituted by perceived objects and their properties.

There is a famous counterargument for naïve realism: the argument from hallucination.¹ This argument shows that if we regard phenomenal aspects of veridical perception and corresponding total hallucination as metaphysically the same (common phenomenal factor principle), then naïve realism is untenable. Since the phenomological aspect of hallucination cannot be constituted by environmental objects, the naïve realist metaphysical claim is incompatible with the common phenomenal factor principle. Given this, naïve realists must hold that the phenomenal aspects of veridical perception and hallucination are explained in different manners (phenomenal disjunctivism). What account should naïve realists provide of the visual phenomenology of hallucination? As is well-known, naïve realism has difficulty explaining the phenomenology of hallucination, due to the “screening off problem” illuminated by Martin (2004, p. 46). The problem is as follows: if the visual phenomenology of a

¹For the argument from hallucination, see Fish (2009, pp. 29-33).
hallucinatory experience is sufficiently explained by a property P which a
veridical experience also has, then it seems inevitable that the visual
phenomenology of the veridical experience will be likewise explained by P.
But, in this case, the perception relation, which naïve realists regard as
explaining the visual phenomenology of veridical experience, seems to be
explanatorily redundant or screened off, for all explanatory work seems to be
performed by the common property P. If the perception relation is explanatorily
useless, then naïve realism collapses. Hence, naïve realists need to devise an
account of the visual phenomenology of hallucination that avoids this problem.

One bold strategy to block this counterargument is to accommodate the
eliminativist claim: hallucinations do not have visual phenomenology. I call the
conjunction of naïve realism and this eliminativist claim “eliminativistic naïve
realism (ENR)”. If hallucinations do not have visual phenomenology, then
naïve realists do not have to provide an account of the visual phenomenology
of hallucinatory experience. Hence, there is nothing to screen off the
explanatory power of the perception relation. Since ENR denies the need to
explain the phenomenology of hallucination, it is more radical than
phenomenal disjunctivism.

However, the eliminativist claim seems to be counterintuitive, implausible
and even obviously wrong. It may be claimed that it is a pre-theoretical fact
that hallucinations have visual phenomenology, or that the concept of
hallucination necessarily involves the possession of visual phenomenology. In
response, Fish (2009, section5) and Logue (2012) argues that ENR is, at the
very least, coherent. Although it is controversial whether their arguments have
succeeded, I assume the coherence of ENR in this paper.

In addition to blocking the argument from hallucination, the eliminativist
claim confers an ontological advantage on naïve realism. Little attention has
been given to this positive aspect of the eliminativist claim. The aim of this
paper is to argue that ENR is the best theory to deal with the explanatory gap
problem. Roughly speaking, my argument is as follows. William Fish (2008;
2009; 2013) argues that naïve realism alone can dissolve the explanatory gap
problem, which has been illuminated by Joseph Levine (1983). However,
Adam Pautz (2013) makes two objections to Fish’s argument. The first is that
naïve realism can at best transform the explanatory gap problem, rather than
dissolving it. The second is that not only naïve realism but also
representationalism can transform the explanatory gap problem in the same
manner. In response to the first objection, I will argue that such a
transformation is epistemologically desirable. For the second objection, I will
argue that naïve realism acquire an ontological advantage over
representationalism by taking in the eliminativist claim.

Two Explanatory Gaps

The explanatory gap problem, to which Fish (2008; 2009) claims that
 naïve realism can provide a solution, is as follows. On a standard qualia theorist view, the phenomenology of a visual experience is an intrinsic, non-representational property of the subject, which nomologically supervenes on certain neural processes in the subject’s brain. Suppose that you are seeing a red apple. In this case, you are likely to have a visual experience with reddish-apple-phenomenology. The qualia theorist maintains that the reddish-apple-phenomenology nomologically supervenes on certain neural processes in your brain. The question to be asked here is, why is the neural processes connected with the reddish-apple-phenomenology, rather than bluish-apple-phenomenology or reddish-banana-phenomenology? We seemingly cannot fully explain, by appealing to any functional or physical properties of the neural processes, why you are undergoing the reddish-apple phenomenology, rather than some other type of phenomenology. This indicates that there is an explanatory gap between the phenomenology of an experience and the neural processes responsible for the experience.

Fish (2008; 2009; 2013) argues that naïve realism can close the explanatory gap. According to Fish, “it is the nature of this environment [the subject is acquainted with]–not the nature of the [brain] processing–that accounts for what it is like to [have a visual experience]” (2013, p.58). That is to say, it is not neural processes but environmental objects and their perceptible properties that we should appeal to in order to answer the question of why you are undergoing the reddish-apple-phenomenology rather than some other type of phenomenology. Since naïve realism holds that the reddish-apple-phenomenology is constituted by the perceived apple and its redness themselves, it does not make sense to further ask why and how the perceived apple and its redness constitutes the reddish-apple-phenomenology, rather than some other type of phenomenology. Such a question is similar to the following nonsense question: why and how do these iron parts constitutes the iron statue, rather than some other type of statue, such as a wood statue? A person who asks such a question is merely misunderstanding the concept of constitution. On the naïve realist view, therefore, there is no explanatory gap between the phenomenology of veridical experience and the perceived environmental objects. If it is inappropriate to explain in terms of certain neural processes why you are undergoing the reddish-apple-phenomenology rather than some other type of phenomenology, then there is no gap between the reddish-apple-phenomenology and the neural processes that we should close by adding some explanatory story. On Fish’s proposal, therefore, the explanatory gap problem is not solved but is dissolved. Such a problem does not exist from the beginning.

Pautz (2013) plausibly claims that what naïve realism can indeed do is not to close the explanatory gap but simply to replace it to a different position,

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1This explanatory gap should be distinguished from a different explanatory gap, which is characterized in terms of the question of why there is something it is like for you to see a red apple. This question is distinct from the question at issue: why is the visual experience of a red apple connected with reddish-apple-phenomenology rather than some other type of phenomenology? What naïve realism can answer is not the former question but the latter one.
which is between microphysical properties (e.g. particular reflectance and arrays of particles) and perceptible properties (e.g. redness and apple-shape). It is undeniable that environmental objects have not only perceptible properties but also microphysical properties. Moreover, it seems plausible that an object has a perceptible property in virtue of having certain microphysical properties. Given these, suppose that your experience has reddish-apple phenomenology. It is not explanatorily enough to say that this is because you are seeing a concrete physical object, and its redness and its apple-shape constitute the phenomenology. We should further explain why and how the particular perceptible properties (redness and apple-shape), rather than other perceptible properties (say, greenness and banana-shape) are connected with the microphysical properties of the object. This explanatory task seems no less difficult than the original one.

In response, Fish (2013) claims the gap should be located between the microphysical properties and perceptible properties (I call this the “objective gap”), rather than between neural processes and intrinsic, non-representational properties (I call this the “subjective gap”). But in what sense is the objective gap better than the subjective one?

One possible way to answer is to emphasize that the objective gap is indeed “original”. As Shoemaker (2003) has explicated, the explanatory gap was located at the objective position before dualism of mind and matter flourishing, but it has been moved to the subjective position by dualists. In this light, it may be claimed that the objective position is the good-old one and that the gap should be moved again by non-dualists to the original position. It is likely that Fish follows this line, because he writes:

The reason we find a subjective explanatory gap in the first place is because it was hoped that the objective explanatory gap could be dealt with by kicking it upstairs into the mind. That might work for a dualist, but for a materialist the problem simply resurfaces in a new, subjective, form. So in relocating it to the world, I am simply putting it back in its original place. (2013, p. 58)

However, it is unclear why the gap should be located at the original position for non-dualists. The fact that an item was originally located at a position does not by itself mean that the item should be there. Fish adds this claim:

if we could make it plausible that […] the character of a particular episode of acquaintance arises from the environment the creature is acquainted with, then we would have made great strides in understanding consciousness, even if there did remain an unsolved problem in metaphysics. (2013, p.58)

His point is that if the gap is moved again from the subjective position to
the (original) objective position in the naïve realist manner, we can obtain a better understanding of perceptual consciousness. However, it is hard to see why that is so. The subjective gap problem consists in the fact that it is unclear why a particular intrinsic property of a subject, rather than some other intrinsic property, is instantiated by certain neural processes. This problem is related to perceptual consciousness, precisely because the intrinsic property is regarded as identical to the phenomenology of perceptual experience. On the other hand, the objective gap problem consists in the fact that it is unclear why a particular perceptible property of an object, rather than some other perceptible property, is realized by certain microphysical properties. Note that naïve realists accept the phenomenal externalist idea that (veridical) perceptual consciousness essentially involves environmental objects and their perceptible properties. Given this, the objective gap problem also seems to be related to perceptual consciousness, because perceptible properties are not ontologically distinct from the phenomenology of veridical experience in the naïve realist framework. As long as we hold on to the phenomenal externalist idea, the question of why a particular perceptible property is realized by certain microphysical properties—“an unsolved problem in metaphysics”—is regarding perceptual consciousness. As we have seen, the objective gap problem is no less difficult than the subjective one. Qualia theorists arguably contend that phenomenal consciousness is located in the brain; naïve realists insist that phenomenal consciousness spread beyond the brain to the environmental world. The fact that these conceptions lead to different explanatory gaps, by itself, does not make us favor one over the other.

Nevertheless, there is at least one argument to show that the subjective gap is more harmful than the objective one from an epistemological perspective. On the qualia theorist view, the phenomenology of a visual experience is private in the sense that a particular token of an intrinsic property is manifested only to the experiencing subject. In this case, we cannot know, via the direct observation of the token, what phenomenology others are undergoing. Here, an epistemological problem arises: it is unclear how we can know what phenomenology others are undergoing. The problem partially stems from the subjective gap. The gap can be plausibly extended from the explanatory level to the metaphysical level. This opens up the metaphysical possibility that the same functional or physical type of brain activity realizes radically different intrinsic properties. Given this possibility, the fact that our brain activities are significantly similar in functional or physical properties does not entail that we have similar phenomenology. Hence, even if you and I see significantly similar scenes and we are almost the same in neural processes, I might undergo radically different phenomenology from yours. This seems to destruct the commonsense idea that the phenomenology which I am undergoing in a perceptual situation is reliable evidence regarding what phenomenology others undergo in a similar situation. Arguably, this leads to the skepticism that we cannot know what phenomenology others undergo.

In response, it may be claimed that we do not need to rule out the above metaphysical possibility in order to know what phenomenology others
undergo. Suppose that there is a *nomological* correlation between the phenomenology of a type of veridical experience and certain neural processes in this actual world. Given that neural processes of those who are in a similar perceptual situation are similar to each other, we would inferentially get to know what type of phenomenology others are undergoing. However, it is unclear how to justify the presence of such a nomological correlation. Perhaps, I can verify the presence of such a correlation *in my case*. When I have a visual experience, I might be able to somehow observe the neural processes of my brain and then contrast them with the phenomenology of the experience. Based on the continuous observation, I might find out a nomological correlation between them. However, it is unjustifiable to generalize the correlation, unless we find out some mechanism to connect the phenomenology of visual experience with certain neural processes. Indeed, the subjective explanatory gap stems from the lack of such a mechanism in the first place.

In contrast, on the naïve realist view, the phenomenology of a veridical visual experience is objectively observable in the sense that we can directly observe a particular token of a perceptible property which constitutes the phenomenology of the veridical experience of others. Suppose that you and I are significantly similar in functional properties relevant to perception. On this supposition, when you and I are seeing the same red apple, we are undergoing the same type of phenomenology that is constituted by the apple and its redness. If I know that you are seeing the same apple as I am, and that the phenomenology of my visual experience is constituted by the apple, then it seems that I am able to inferentially know what phenomenology you are undergoing. Even if the objective gap can be extended to the metaphysical level, any epistemological problem does not arise. Since perceptible properties themselves are objectively observable, the fact that others are seeing a particular instance of a perceptible property is visually knowable. Given this, the metaphysical possibility that the same microphysical properties realize radically different perceptible properties does not lead to the skepticism that we cannot know, via direct observation, what perceptible properties others are seeing. The metaphysical possibility can cause a relevant epistemological problem only when all we can directly observe are microphysical properties. This is obviously not the case. Therefore, even if we take into account the metaphysical possibility, there is no reason to deny that we are able to know what phenomenology others are undergoing. This is the epistemological reason for favoring the objective gap.

Note that this is not to say that we can *perfectly* know what phenomenology others are undergoing. Taking into account our individual differences, this is very implausible. My point is rather that it is commonsense that we can know what phenomenology others are undergoing to some extent, and that the subjective gap is destructive to this commonsense idea. Suppose that I am short-sighted and you are clear-sighted. Even if we are seeing the same red apple, our visual experiences are different in phenomenology. The phenomenology of my experience is not constituted by the determinate shade
and shape of the apple, because I do not have a perceptual capacity enough to recognize such shade and shape. Nevertheless, since I can see the determinable color and shape of the apple, the phenomenology is constituted by the apple and its determinable color and shape. In contrast, the phenomenology of your experience is constituted by the apple and its determinate shade and shape. This entails that it is also constituted by the determinable color and shape, which constitute the phenomenology of my experience. In this case, I cannot perfectly know what phenomenology you are undergoing, simply because the constituents of my experience are not entirely the same as yours. Nevertheless, I can know what phenomenology you are undergoing to some extent, since our experiences have the common constituents, such as the determinable color and shape.\(^1\) It is intuitively plausible that in everyday situations, we can know what phenomenology others are undergoing to such extent. As we have seen, the qualia theorist view has to let go of this commonsense idea. Because of this epistemological advantage, the explanatory gap should be located at the objective position rather than the subjective position.

### ENR or Representationalism

Can naïve realism alone locate the explanatory gap at the objective position? The main rival of naïve realism is representationalism, which is characterized as a conjunction of the following explanatory and metaphysical claims: (1) a visual experience has phenomenology in virtue of the subject’s visual system representing environmental objects and their properties; (2) the phenomenology of a visual experience is identical to a certain representational content of the experience (I call the content RCE).\(^2\) As Pautz (2013) has pointed out, some kinds of representationalism accept that “the sensible qualities are in the mind-independent world” (p.29). That is, representationalists can hold that RCE contains perceptible properties as its components. Given this, such representationalists can identify the phenomenology of veridical visual experience with perceptible properties which can be instantiated by environmental objects. This suggests that naïve realism and representationalism do not differ in where to locate the explanatory gap. However, this does not mean they are entirely on a par. In this section, I will argue that ENR is ontologically better than representationalism.

First, it should be noted that RCE is an abstract entity, which cannot be identical to a concrete spatiotemporal component of the environmental world. The question to be asked here is, what kind of abstract entity is RCE? Note that

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\(^1\)For the naïve realist account as to how the environmental world feature in our phenomenal experience, see Fish (2009, section 3).

\(^2\)There is also a weaker metaphysical characterization: the phenomenology of a visual experience supervenes on a certain representational content of the experience. This characterization is insufficient in that it does not indicate anything about the ontological status of visual phenomenology (Tye 2009). Since this paper focus on such ontological status, I adopt the stronger characterization.
the phenomenology of veridical visual experience is presentational in nature in
the sense that a veridical visual experience phenomenally presents the subject
with something that seems to be environmental objects. RCE must be
explanatory of this presentational nature of veridical visual experience. I call
this explanatory requirement the “presentational requirement”. Now,
representationalists have two options. The first is to characterize RCE as a
distinctive type of content, which is essentially different from the type of
content attributed to cognitive activities/states, such as thinking, judging or
beliefs (I call such content “cognitive content”). The second is to think that
RCE is not essentially different from cognitive content. A type of content is
essentially different from another type of content if and only if each type of
contents is metaphysically analyzed in terms of a different kind of abstract
entity. I will discuss this point in detail later. My argument is that either option
leads to, in different manners, the same conclusion that naïve realism has an
ontological advantage over representationalism.

According to the first option, RCE is essentially different from cognitive
content. On this option, it seems that the presentational requirement can be
satisfied, because representationalists can freely introduce a special type of
content that is defined as satisfying it. It is not incoherent to think that RCE is
primitively explanatory of the presentational nature of veridical visual
experience. However, this option imposes an ontological burden on
representationalists. In order to metaphysically analyze such special type of
content, they must accommodate a distinct abstract entity in their ontology, in
addition to the abstract entities to analyze cognitive content. It is of course not
reprehensible to introduce an abstract entity in order to explain a phenomenon.
My point is rather that we should be economical with respect to ontological
commitment. That is to say, we should not introduce an abstract entity if an
explanatory task at hand is achieved by reference to entities in hand. Naïve
realists do not require any abstract entity for characterizing the phenomenology
of veridical experiences. All they need to invoke are concrete physical objects
instantiating perceptible properties, which representationalists must also
accommodate in their ontology.

Perhaps, representationalists can establish a reductive theory of RCE in
which RCE is fully analyzed in terms of scientifically admissible entities.\(^1\) In
this case, representationalism does not involve any additional abstract entities.
However, there is a fairly general agreement that no satisfactory reductive
theory has been established.\(^2\) Unless such a theory is actually constructed, we
can permissibly exclude it from our consideration. Thus, if representationalists
take the first option, it follows that naïve realism is more ontologically
economical than representationalism.

According to the second option, RCE is not essentially different from
cognitive content. Representationalists who takes this option may claim that
naïve realism does not have any advantage in ontological economy, since naïve

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\(^1\)Dretske (2003) and Tye (2009) are the representative advocates of such a reductive theory.
\(^2\)For a comprehensive objection to such reductive theories, see Pautz (2010).
realists should also admit that cognitive activities/states have representational contents. In response, naïve realists have a suspicion that it is difficult to satisfy the presentational requirement by appealing to the type of content that is shared with cognitive activities/states, since cognitive activities/states are not presentational. This is certainly true, but representationalists do not have to appeal to the same type of content as that of cognitive content. Even if two types of contents are not essentially different, it does not entail these types are the same. That is to say, even if two types of contents are metaphysically analyzed in terms of one kind of abstract entity, these types of contents can be differently characterized. Suppose that a type of content is characterized in terms of singular propositions and another type of content is characterized in terms of general propositions. In such a case, this characterization commits us to only one abstract entity, proposition. Nevertheless, each type of content would have different explanatory power.

There is, however, a significant difference between naïve realism and representationalism as to what abstract entity can be used to metaphysically analyze cognitive content. Naïve realists do not have to characterize visual phenomenology in terms of representational content. Hence, the abstract entities that are employed to analyze cognitive content do not need to have the potential to satisfy the presentational requirement. In contrast, representationalists must use RCE to characterize visual phenomenology. Hence, the abstract entities that are employed to analyze cognitive content must have the potential.

This difference indicates that naïve realism is open to more various metaphysical analyses of cognitive content as compared to representationalism. Take the possible world analysis for example. Suppose that one believes that there is a red apple in front of him/her. On this analysis, the content is analyzed as the set of possible worlds in which there is a red apple in front of him/her (or his/her duplicate). Let us plausibly assume that satisfaction conditions of cognitive activities/states are adequately captured by this possible world analysis. Under this assumption, this analysis is available to naïve realists. However, representationalists seemingly cannot adopt it. The possible world analysis has not been intended to capture the presentational nature of visual experience in the first place. It is indeed unclear how a relation to a set of possible worlds can explain the phenomenology of a veridical visual experience. It seems extremely implausible that when one has a visual experience with the RCE that there is an apple in front of him/her, all possible worlds in which there is an apple in front of him/her are phenomenally presented to him/her. From the phenomenological perspective, it seems that a world (whether this is the actual world or a non-actual world) alone can be presented to us at a time. If this consideration is correct, then the possible world analysis cannot be applied to RCE, which is supposed to be identical to the phenomenology of visual experiences. Therefore, while naïve realists can include the possible world analysis in the candidate list of metaphysical analyses of cognitive content, representationalists seemingly cannot adopt it.

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1 For the detail of this analysis, see Stalnaker (1984) and Lewis (1986, section 1.4)
analyses of cognitive content, representationalists cannot do so.

Generally speaking, the concept of representational content has been mainly used to capture the satisfaction conditions of mental states. Given this, it is reasonable to think that some other existing metaphysical analyses of cognitive content do not meet the presentational requirement. Thus, the second option imposes much constraint on the metaphysical analysis of cognitive content. This is a severe disadvantage of representationalism.

In response, representationalists may claim that the presentational nature of veridical visual experience should be explained not by RCE itself but the special mode of representing. Perceptual experience represents a certain content in a presentational manner; cognitive activity/state represents a certain content in a non-presentational manner. On this strategy, RCE itself does not have to meet the presentational requirement. However, this idea leads to the same problem as the first option. Since the relation of representing in a presentational manner is not included in the naïve realist ontology, naïve realism is ontologically more economical than representationalism.

Representationalists might maintain that naïve realism must include the special acquaintance relation in its ontology in order to explain the phenomenology of veridical visual experience, instead of the special representation relation. If so, naïve realism and representationalism does not differ in ontological economy. However, this is not the case. The explanatory claim of naïve realism has been that a veridical visual experience has phenomenology in virtue of the subject’s perceiving environmental objects. The perception relation should be understood in an ordinary sense, rather than in a unique sense used by naïve realists alone. It is almost undeniable that we can perceive environmental objects in such an ordinary sense. Hence, representationalists must accommodate the perception relation into their ontology. Thus, if representationalism draws upon the special representation relation, it follows that naïve realism has an ontological advantage over representationalism. Consequently, whichever option representationalists take, naïve realism has an ontological advantage over representationalism.

Most importantly, the eliminativist claim is crucial for this argument. If naïve realists dismiss it, then they need to accommodate certain entities (say, qualia, sense-data or a certain type of representational content) in order to explain the phenomenology of hallucinations. The accommodation of such entities obviously deprives naïve realism of the ontological advantage mentioned above. ENR alone can appeal to the advantage.

**Conclusion**

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1If you cast doubt on the existence of the ordinary sense of “perceiving”, naïve realists can exchange it with “seeing”. There is likely to be no one denying the existence of the ordinary sense of “seeing”.

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From the above discussion, we can reasonably conclude that ENR can best deal with the explanatory gap problem. This would count as an important motivation for naïve realism.

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