

Transparency Theories and Strong Intentionalism:

A Philosophical Investigation

(PhD Thesis Synopsis)

By

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One of the most important questions in the context of my thesis is, ‘what are experiences themselves like’ or ‘what is it like to undergo certain experiences’? In my thesis I have addressed this question following transparency theories and strong intentionalism.

Now the question arises, what is transparency of experience? According to the transparency thesis of experience, ‘what it is like to undergo certain experiences’ or the phenomenal character of experience is nothing over and above the representational properties of experience.

Perceptual experience has both the representational and phenomenal character. There is an ongoing debate whether the representational character of perceptual experience determines the phenomenal character of experience. According to some philosophers (Tye, 1992; Dretske, 1997, Byrne, 2001) the representational character of perceptual experience exhausts the phenomenal character of experience. They suggest that the intentional content or the intentional objects determines the phenomenal character of experience. In this regard my thesis primarily deals with strong intentionalism. While defending strong intentionalism many philosophers (Harman, 1990; Tye, 1992) directly appeal to the transparency intuition of experience. Whereas there are some philosophers like Crane (2000, 2001, 2009) who defend strong intentionalism but reject transparency intuition. The philosophers (Block, 1996, 2003; Jackson, 1982) who accept the distinctive phenomenal character of experience refuses to accept the view that the representational character of perceptual experience determines the phenomenal character of experience. The phenomenal character of experience is referred to as ‘qualia’ or intrinsic property of experience. They even reject the transparency intuition. These philosophers adhere to phenomenism (Block, 1996, 2003). The thesis also explores the view of the philosophers (Martin, 2002) who accept transparency intuition but reject strong intentionalism. Martin (2002) supports phenomenal transparency. Intentionalism has been

defined by different philosophers differently. The dissertation primarily explores Tim Crane's (2000, 2001, 2009) interpretation of intentionalism.

The thesis focuses on two main questions:

- (i) whether the transparency intuition is correct.
- (ii) whether it supports strong intentionalism.

In the subsequent chapters each of the aspects of the debate has been explored in detail. The discussions in the synopsis are presented in the following way:

The first chapter discusses the origin and the short introduction of the debate presented in the thesis.

In the second chapter, I have introduced the transparency intuition and shown how the authors like Tye (1992, 1996, 2002, 2008) and Byrne (2001) have used this intuition to extract the arguments for strong intentionalism. In the third chapter, I have considered Martin's (2002) view on transparency, which showcases that the transparency argument can be explained by another account, which is incompatible with the claim of strong intentionalism. In this chapter I have also discussed Crane's (2000, 2001, 2009) attack on transparency.

In the fourth chapter, I have discussed the various challenges against the transparency intuition and explored how the intuition of transparency is rejected by philosophers like Block (1996, 2003) and Jackson (1982). The purpose is to show whether all mental states which have phenomenal character can be explained in terms of representational content?

The following sections will show the arguments that are discussed in the subsequent chapters of the PhD thesis.

1) Transparency and Strong Intentionalism

This chapter introduces the intuition of transparency of experience. It also discusses the account of transparency (Evans, 1982) for self-knowledge. The purpose of this chapter is to show that these two varied intuitions of transparency are strongly connected and they support strong intentionalism. Strong intentionalism could be better explained by a reference to the transparency account of self-knowledge. This chapter mainly explicates the opinions of Tye (1992, 2002, 2008), Dretske (1997), Byrne (2001) on strong intentionalism.

Transparency intuition is introduced by referring to Moore's (1903) literature. Moore (1903) has mentioned 'diaphaneity' to explain the transparency of experience. Although he himself rejects the transparent nature of experience, the source of transparency is found in his literature.

The intuition of transparency of experience suggests that the phenomenal character of experience is exhausted by the representational character of experience. For example, I am looking at a green colored gold emerald ring. The reflection of light on the green emerald constitutes the conscious character of my experience. One might say that the conscious character of experience is distinct from the intentional object i.e. the green colored emerald gold ring. Those who support the intuition of transparency in the context of strong intentionalism state that the awareness of perceptual experience reveals to the mind-independent objects of experience. Apart from the objects of experience there is nothing which can be referred to as the phenomenal character of experience. Thus the objects and the properties instantiated by them determine the phenomenal character of perceptual experience.

Tye (1992, 2002, 2008), Dretske (1997) and Byrne (2001) are representationalists. They suggest that the representational character of experience determines the phenomenal character

of experience. In other words, intentional content or the intentional objects determine the phenomenal character of experience.

Tye (1992, 2002, 2008, 2014, 2017, 2021) and Harman (1990) while defending strong intentionalism strongly recommends the intuition of transparency of experience. Whereas Dretske (1997) and Byrne (2001) do not explicitly talk about the intuition of transparency in defence of strong intentionalism. This chapter shows that their view on strong intentionalism is deeply rooted with the transparency account of self-knowledge.

Before going into the details of the opinions of these philosophers the chapter clarifies terminologies like *intentional objects*, *intentional content*, *phenomenal character* or '*qualia*', etc. It showcases how strong intentionalism has been conceived by different philosophers. Tye (1992, 2002) states that the conscious character of perceptual state is determined by the representational and the intentional content. Crane (2000, 2001, 2009) suggests that the conscious character of intentional state is determined by both the 'mode' and the 'content' of experience.

1.1) Tye in support of transparency and strong intentionalism

Tye (1992, 1996, 2002, 2008) suggests that perceptual state and all other mental states are intentional. Sensory experience and emotional states are also intentional. He supports unrestricted intentionalism. The example provided by Tye (1992) showcases that the awareness of perceptual experience of blue colored ocean revealed to the mind-independent intentional objects i.e. the blue colored ocean. The introspective awareness does not access any properties of the experience itself apart from the representational character of experience. Thus the perceptual experience is transparent with respect to the represented intentional objects and the properties they instantiate.

Tye (1992) suggests the same is applicable to the cases like an after-image. In the case of the after-image the red round spot that appears before us is caused due to the stimulus received by us. The stimulus stimulates our optical nerve and it leads to the perception of after-images. Therefore the properties that we perceive in the cases of after-images are not the properties of the experience. The perception of after-images occurs due to the photo-chemical activity of the retina.

Tye (2002) states that blurry images are caused by neuro-physiological activity. Blurriness is not the property of the experience. Seeing a blurry image and seeing something as blurry in both cases we find that the distinctiveness can be explained by referring to two levels of cognitive states. Realisation of perceiving a blurry image is counted as a level along with the perception of a clear image blurrily which makes the second level. In the former case the blurriness is the property of the intentional objects and in the latter blurriness occurs due to the poor eyesight of the individual.

Hence Tye (1992, 1996, 2002, 2008) proves that if there is any phenomenal character of experience it can be explained in terms of the representational character of perceptual experience. The intuition of transparency supports strong intentionalism.

1.2) Byrne's view on strong intentionalism

Byrne (2001) holds that intentional or representational content is fundamental for explaining the change in the phenomenal character of perceptual experience. He suggests that even in higher-order mental states the changes in the phenomenal character of experience can be explained by referring to the content of the perceptual experience. Suppose, an individual is undergoing a certain perceptual experience of arts. She is so absorbed by the art that she fails to notice a guard standing nearby. After sometime when she is asked about the guard she

cannot connect the fact. There occurs a change in the phenomenal character of experience. Once the incident is narrated she can successfully recollect it. It might seem that the change in the phenomenal character is independent of the representational content of experience. The facts related to the individual's memory can only be explained with reference to the intentional content. Thus the change in the phenomenal character of experience can be explained with reference to the representational content.

Byrne's (2001) view on strong intentionalism indirectly invokes the intuition of transparency. It suggests that content is the reliable indicator for detecting the intentional states. Content can be viewed as states of affairs. States of affairs pass the information to the subject which in turn generates the changes in the phenomenal character or the higher-order cognitive states (memory) accordingly. The view is particularly connected with the transparency method for self-knowledge as advocated by Evans (1982). He suggests that the content or the external world are the reliable indicator for knowing our mental states. For example, if someone asks whether it is raining outside, in order to answer this question I need to look outside which correctly represents the state of affairs. Evans (1982) does not talk about the phenomenal character of experience. The transparency account of self-knowledge can be used for defending strong intentionalism.

Byrne (2001) explicates that the changes in the modality of perceptual experience can also be explained with reference to the representational content of experience. He thus categorises intentionalism in two types. These are intramodal and intermodal strong intentionalism. Modality is understood in terms of perceptual mode like, sight, touch etc. Intramodal intentionalists suggest that the difference in the modalities should be understood functionally. Lycan supports this view. On the other hand, intermodal intentionalists suggest that the changes in the modalities occur due to the changes in the content. For example, the visual and tactile experience of copper jewellery boxes occurs due to the perception of different

representational properties experienced by the respective sense-organs. The properties experienced by visual and tactile experience constitute two different contents of perceptual experience. Therefore, Byrne's (2001) view suggests that the experience of different modality occurs due to the perception of different contents. Byrne's (2001) view on strong intentionalism is supported by the transparency intuition.

1.3) Dretske's representationalism and strong intentionalism

Dretske (1997) suggests that all mental events are representational facts. His representationalism is referred to as 'naturalised representationalism'. The facts related to mental states can be explained in terms of neuro-physiological processes. He holds that if there is phenomenal character of experience it can be explained with reference to the properties represented by the intentional objects.

Dretske (1997) defined the representational aspects of natural and conventional indicators. The natural indicator (human mind) derives its representational aspects from its biological or natural evolutionary process. On the other hand the conventional indicators (thermometer, watch, etc.) acquire their representational functions from their creator or inventor. The functions of both the natural and conventional indicator is to represent facts.

Following this, Dretske (1997) suggests that two modes of representation can be found while defining the representational aspects of experience. They are object-perception and facts-perception. Object perceptions are explained as sensory mode of perception. This is referred to as representation_s. The sensory mode of representation is defined as the way the sense-organs encounter the objects represented in the perceptual experience. The sensory mode of representation is non-conceptual. On the other hand, object perception represents facts about the objects. This is called the conceptual mode of representation. This is referred

to as representation_a. It represents thoughts (belief, judgement) about the objects represented. For e.g. one can know that the stick drowned in water is straight (conceptual representation) while at the sensory level it looks bent.

How is the intuition of transparency connected with Dretske's view on strong intentionalism? Dretske (1997) accepts the role of introspection while admitting the representational aspects of mind. He suggests that the awareness of perceptual experience may not be determined by looking at the intentional objects directly. The knowledge of facts about an object x may not be known by looking at the x itself. The knowledge of x may be dependent on other facts which are the reliable indicator of x. This is called 'displaced-perception' by Dretske (1997). For example, by looking at a power wheelchair I cannot know the facts about the power wheelchair. The facts include that the wheelchair covers 5km/hr, it has two battery boxes, the battery takes three hours to be completely charged and so on. In order to know these facts I need a certain conceptual background about the power wheelchair which is a reliable indicator of these facts. These reliable indicators represent facts about the power wheelchair. The coordination of both (representation_s) and (representation_a) represents the facts about the objects. The coordination of both is defined as 'introspection' by Dretske (1997).

This view is strongly connected with Evans (1982) transparency method of self-knowledge. Evans (1982) suggests that sensory experiences are informative but they are non-conceptual. Thoughts (belief, judgement) based on this information are conceptual. The process of conceptualization happens by taking subjects from one informational state to another. The information gets processed by acquiring several concepts. Thus, it takes the subject to another cognitive state (belief, judgement) with the conceptual content. Conceptualization is not a sensory process. This is a process by which human beings enrich their domain of knowledge.

Thus, the subject in order to have experience requires the coordination of both the informational state and the relevant concept which she acquires in the process of gaining knowledge about the informational world. Therefore, following both Evans (1982) and Dretske (1997) we can conclude that experience is the package of both sensory representation and conceptual representation.

2) Transparency and Opacity

This chapter discusses that some philosophers accept transparency but rejects strong intentionalism. Martin (2002) suggests that perspectival aspects cannot be explained in the context of strong intentionalism. The chapter also suggests that some philosophers like Crane (2000, 2001, 2009) reject the intuition of transparency despite adhering to strong intentionalism.

Martin (2002) holds that the intentional or representational content is not adequate to capture the perspectival features of perceptual experience. These perspectival features of experience cannot be reduced into the intentional content or the represented objects and the properties exemplified by the objects. For instance, I am looking at a chess board. I might imagine the possible moves or it might generate several other memories and so on. Martin (2002) suggests that such perspectival aspects cannot be explained only in terms of objects represented. The awareness of perceptual experience reveals to us the mind-independent objects but it does in a non-representational manner. The type of transparency intuition defended by Martin (2002) is called 'phenomenal transparency'.

2.1) Phenomenal transparency and disjunctivism

Martin (2002) supports ‘disjunctivism’ in order to defend ‘phenomenal transparency’. He states that ‘disjunctivism’ denies the view that perception forms a common experience following all cases of veridical and non-veridical perception. This view is contrary to strong intentionalism. Martin’s (2002) disjunctivism is a type of naive realism. Naive realism suggests that the phenomenal character of veridical and non-veridical experience differs due to the presence of actual objects presented before the individual. The cases of hallucinations make naive realism false. In case of hallucination the objects of perceptual experience are not presented before the individual but the awareness of experience persists. Martin (2002) in order to solve this problem suggests a type of naive realism i.e. ‘disjunctivism’.

Martin (2002) explicates that the awareness of perceptual experience forms a different phenomenal character or phenomenal state in case of sensory experience and imagination. Following strong intentionalism we cannot distinguish between genuine sensory experience and imagination.

According to Martin (2002) to imagine something sensorily means to imagine it the way it is experienced. Sensory experience and imagination constitutes different phenomenal states of perceptual experience. For example, the sensory experience of itch is more vivid and clear rather than the imagination of itch. Here the intentional object i.e. the feeling of itch is the same in two different kinds of experiences but it leads to the changes in the phenomenal character of experience accordingly. Perceptual experience is transparent with respect to the objects of experience but it needs to be explained in terms of the relational aspect. How the subject is related to the experience cannot be explained only with reference to the represented objects. Rather the phenomenal state of the experience is explained in terms of relation that exists between the world and the individual.

Dretske's (1997) 'displaced-perception' can offer a possible answer to Martin's (2002) 'phenomenal transparency'. Perspectival aspects of perceptual experience can be reduced into several representational facts. These relational aspects assume a conceptual background which is representational in nature. Following Dretske's non-conceptual and conceptual mode of representations we can restore the claim of strong intentionalism. Previously it was shown that Dretske's 'displaced-perception' supports transparency intuition. Therefore, both strong intentionalism and transparency are restored.

3) Phenomenism and the transparency debate

This chapter discusses the debates raised against transparency theories and strong intentionalism. Philosophers like Block (1996, 2003) and Jackson (1982) reject both representationalism and the intuition of transparency.

Block argues that the representational character of perceptual experience cannot completely determine the phenomenal character of experience. We need to accept the distinctness of the phenomenal character of perceptual experience. Block's thesis (1996, 2003) is referred to as 'phenomenism'. He suggests cases like inverted spectrum, mental paint, after-images, bodily sensation etc. portrays that there is a distinctive existence of phenomenal character of experience over and above the representational character of experience.

The instances of inverted spectrum showcases the peculiarity of an individual's colour perception which differs from the other human beings due to the distinctiveness of the phenomenal character of experience. The perception of the same representational or intentional content leads to the perception of different phenomenal character of experience.

Bodily sensations like feeling of orgasm points out that feeling of pleasure differs in two partners while involved in the act of sex. The question is despite being involved in the same

neuro-physical process why the intensity of pleasure is different between two persons. This exclusive observer-dependent experience suggests that there must be something distinctive to the phenomenal character of experience which cannot be reduced into the representational character of experience.

Jackson (1982) showcases that an individual's first time colour sensation cannot be reduced into the physical facts or information about colours which the individual possesses. A person might possess several facts or information about a particular colour. When she perceives the colour for the first time she learns something new which cannot be reduced into the physical facts about that colour that she possesses. The instance proves the distinctive existence of qualia.

The chapter also includes the opinions of John (2005) and Speaks (2009) in order to examine whether there exists any distinctive phenomenal character of experience. Both showcases that representationalism can explain why there is no need to accept the distinctive existence of 'qualia'.

The final part of my thesis investigates whether the arguments of transparency successfully explains the arguments against strong intentionalism. The cases like inverted spectrum, mental paint, blurred vision, after images, the variation in frequency (auditory experience), etc. suggests that the representational content or the intentional objects are not sufficient to explain the distinctness of the phenomenal character of the experience. Hence the phenomenal character of experience cannot be determined by the representational content or the intentional objects.

Further, strong intentionalism while accommodating the transparency intuition fails to explain the cases like hallucination. In case of hallucination the same representational content or the properties of the same intentional content can generate two different thoughts in two

different persons. Therefore the same representational content can lead to the changes in the phenomenal character of experiences in two persons differently. If that is the case, then we cannot defend strong intentionalism by appealing to the transparency intuition.

Throughout the thesis I have introduced various notions of transparency thesis. Therefore in the thesis my chief concern is to examine whether transparency defends the claim of strong intentionalism in the context of perceptual experience by answering all the counter views or challenges raised against it.

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