One kind of substantial critique which has been raised by several philosophers against the so called higher order perception theory (HOP), advocated for mainly by William Lycan, concerns the combination of two important claims: (i) that qualia are wide contents of perceptual experiences, and (ii) that the subject becomes aware of what the world is like (to her) by perceiving her own experiences of the world. In what sense could we possibly watch our own mental states if they are representations whose content and qualitative character is determined by factors that are external to the mind? Here I will do my best in order to understand this claim.

A quite common assumption about objects of perception is that such objects must have some intrinsic properties, an “object” which lacks such properties cannot be perceived in the normal sense of the term. According to the founders of the perception-theory of introspection, (i.e., John Locke, Franz Brentano, etc) mental states did have such qualities. A perception of a red tomato is according to this view itself red and bulgy. What any given perception feels like is according to these thinkers (in my modern reconstruction) determined by its intrinsic qualities. By “looking at” or
attending to our experiences we can therefore become aware of their properties.

William Lycan is not a sense data theorist. However, the representational theory of consciousness he endorses shares some similarities with this kind of theory. Both theories state that perception involves representations of the physical world and both theories claim that we are aware of these representations, but in Lycan’s version, the representations do not resemble the things we perceive. The question is: how can we become aware of what it is like to perceive the world by looking at such mental states?

This means that *qualia* are not intrinsic properties of perceptual states according to Lycan. We can discern the following two (rough) characterisations of qualia:

(i) Qualia are *intrinsic* features of experiences, which may vary without any variation in the intentional content of the experience. This view is upheld by e.g., Thomas Nagel (1974), Ned Block (1990) and David Rosenthal. And Titchener

(ii) Qualia are *representational* properties of experiences. This is the view of e.g., Carruthers, Dretske, Lycan, Tye, and Shoemaker.
Lycan holds that the *phenomenal character* of being in a certain perceptual state is a matter of the representational content of the experience. A perception of a low tone is a representation of a low tone. A perception of a red cow is a representation of a cow that is red. The pitch of the tone or the colour experienced are not properties of the experience, but of the represented object. Lycan also maintains that the phenomenal character of experiences is a matter of the experience representing objective properties of physical objects. This means that qualia are represented properties of experiences and not representing properties.

“The Representational theory affords a third alternative, by supposing that qualia are *intentional contents* of sensory states, properties of intentional objects, represented properties of representata.”

Many authors have noticed and discussed the peculiarity of this standpoint. How can we be acquainted with qualia by perceiving the representational vehicle, unless, of course, for some reason the vehicle shares qualitative similarities with the object it represents. Barry Maund points out that the distinction between properties of the representational vehicle and those of the objects represented is conceptual. It is not ruled out that the vehicle and the object have the same properties. Maund writes:

[S]omeone may portray John Malkovich in a movie by being John Malkovich”

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1 Lycan 2001, p 18.
I think Maund is correct in holding that it is not impossible that the representational vehicle have the same intrinsic properties as the object represented, but clearly this could not the case here. According to Lycan’s naturalistic assumptions sensory representations are patterns of activation of the central nervous system. It is beyond dispute that these representational vehicles do not “look like” that which they represent. Fred Dretske also acknowledges this fact:

“All one can become aware of by scanning (monitoring – choose your favourite word) internal affairs are activities of the nervous system. That, after all, is all that is in there. All that is in the head are the representational vehicles, not the contents, the facts that make these vehicles into thoughts and experiences. You cannot represent a thought or experience as a thought or experience, you cannot achieve metarepresentation, by seeing, hearing, smelling or tasting the thought or experience itself. All that experience (in whatever modality) of an experience gives one is a sensory representation of some part of, or process in, the brain. It will not yield a representation of an experience – that part or process in the brain – as an experience.”3

Is it possible to interpret Lycan’s theory in some other way? He does not explicitly frame his theory in neuro-physiological terms. He discusses consciousness in terms of “thoughts”, “perception”, “awareness”, “content” and so on. It is not specified exactly what the metaphysical status of mental representations of the first and the second order is. Sydney Shoemaker points out that perceptual experiences still lack perceivable

features in so far as such experiences are completely determined by the
*representational relations* they have to features that are external to the mind.

“We can perceive relations between things we perceive; but we wouldn’t perceive these
things at all, and so couldn’t perceive relations between them, if they didn’t present
themselves as having intrinsic, nonrelational properties.”

Güven Güzeldere makes a similar point: even if we treat the representations
involved as *mental* rather than neurophysiological, the problem still remains,
he says. We cannot learn what is being represented by looking at the
representation. Güzeldere calls this “the fallacy of the representational
divide”. The mistake is to attempt to replace what is being represent-*ed* with
that which is the represent-*er*.

“Operating on the basis of this unacknowledged assumption is somewhat like trying out
what a stop sign is by studying only the color, shape, material, and mass of the actual
sign. Surely one would learn a lot of facts, but expecting to find out in this way what the
stop sign *qua* a traffic symbol really is would be a mistake.”

So what features does the representational vehicle have that enables us to
become aware of external objects by looking at the representation of these
objects if it does not represent by iconic resemblance? Gregg Ten Elshof
claims that representations *are* suited to be objects of inner sense. He argues
that two experiences that are different in virtue of what they represent must

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5 Güzeldere 1997, p. 797.
also be intrinsically different somehow and that this difference could be detected by an inner sense.

“Particular experiences would fail to be well-suited to be the objects of inner-sense if they were not genuine, determinate objects or entities with determinate and discoverable qualities. But a particular experience (say, one which represents there being an orange, round object), like anything else which actually exists, will have determinate features which make it what it is as opposed to something else.”

That may be true, but since Lycan claims that we become aware of what the world is like by perceiving our perceptual experiences, the discoverable qualities of an experience that represents there being an orange, round object should be orangehood and roundness since that is what we are aware of. But it seems very improbable that an experience is (intrinsically) orange and round, i.e., that the representational vehicle would have these properties.

However, Lycan holds that the phenomenology of perception is not entirely reducible to whatever the perceptual experiences represent. He argues that there are modes of presentation under which phenomenal states are given. Could these, as being properties of the representations as such, be what we are aware of in introspection? Unfortunately, modes of presentations do not represent qualia, according to Lycan. Modes of

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presentations are to be understood as functional roles, and qualia again, are wide contents of perceptual states.

“There is no such thing as representation without a mode of presentation. If a quale is a representatum, then it is represented under a mode of presentation, and modes of presentation may be narrow even when the representational content itself is wide. Indeed many philosophers of mind, myself included, take modes of presentation to be internal causal or functional roles played by representations in question. […] Remember, the qualia themselves are properties like phenomenal yellowness and redness and greenness, which according to the Representational theory are representata. The mode or guise under which redness and greenness are represented in vision are something else again.”

Awareness of the representational vehicle in terms of awareness of its mode of presentation surely does not explain how it is that we are aware of redness, greenness and roundness and so forth, because those properties are not represented by the presentational mode. It may, however, explain why it does not “feel” the same to taste a tomato and to smell it. So this does not provide a solution to the problem.

Perhaps the problem is that we are not creative enough when we try to understand what “perceive” means. Could there be some interpretation of “perceive” that we have not yet thought of, one which will fit Lycan’s account of higher order perception? One which does not require the immediate presence of objects with intrinsic properties? Well, it is possible

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to perceive that something is the case, e.g., that Lisa is out riding the horse, while not being aware of any intrinsic Lisa-horse-properties or standing in a causal relation to Lisa and the horse. We can however not be aware of Lisa riding the horse in the same manner.

Dretske’s terminology from 1999 is helpful here. He claims that in introspection, we are fact-aware of our own experiences while not being object-aware of them. He distinguishes between: object-awareness, property-awareness and fact-awareness (o-awareness, p-awareness and f-awareness, respectively). Let o be an object, an event or a state (a spatio-temporal particular) and P a property of o. We can be aware, both of P, of o and of the fact that o is P. These forms of being aware are (conceptually, not causally) independent of one another. The phenomenal character of perceptual experiences is determined by the qualities one is p-aware of. Object-awareness has to do with the causal relations experiences have to objects in the world and fact-awareness has to do with what knowledge our perceptual experiences give rise to. We can, thus, be aware of an object while not being aware of its properties and we can be aware of some properties that an object has while not at the same time being aware of the object.
“[I]ntrospection represents a first order state under an aspect, or as being in a certain way, and this “way” doubtless has something to do with the first-order state’s own quale or sensory quality.”

Lycan also says that introspection represents our experiences as having certain properties. It classifies them, and assigns them to kinds. What does “to be aware of something as something” mean? Barry Maund proposes that this kind of awareness combines elements from object-awareness and fact-awareness.

“I am presented with an instance of a quality (or complex of qualities: redness, roundness, hard-edgedness…) and I am aware of it as, say, being present and before me, and perhaps as an instance of red.”

I think that regarding “awareness as” as a combination between fact- and object-awareness confuses things. “Awareness as” is nothing but property awareness in Dretske’s terminology. Object-awareness, on the other hand is a causal affair. We can only be object-aware of something if there is a real physical object we are aware of. It is property-awareness that entails being aware of shapes and colours and so on, where it is not required that we have any concepts for these properties. A child can thus be property-aware of a pentagon, which means that she sees that this shape is different than the shape of e.g., triangle. She will be fact-aware of the pentagon when she

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8 Lycan 2003, p. 26 (italics, the author’s)
10 Maund 2003, p. 177.
knows that a form like this is called “pentagon”. Mere (conscious) object-awareness in Dretske’s sense here, does not seem possible. Dretske, most probably, does not think that the subject has to be property-aware of her experiences, in order to become aware of the experiences.

Lycan obviously thinks that the subject is both object-aware and property-aware of her own experiences. A higher order perception is caused by an experience of the first order and the higher order perceptions make the subject aware of what her first order experiences are like. When the subject is aware of what her experiences are like, she is aware of them as being in a certain way, she can discriminate one from another and so on, but she does not have to be able to apply concepts to her experiences. She does not have to be aware that a certain experience is a red-experience and not a green-experience, for instance. A higher order perception theorist could argue that a subject can be object-aware of her first order experiences but not property-aware and in that case she will not be aware of what they are like. (If there were some special point to be made by such a claim."

Can we interpret Lycan as claiming that we are just fact-aware of our experiences? This is a way out that Dretske offers him.\footnote{Dretske 2003, pp 8- 9.}
Lycan rejects such a solution. He writes:

“If the scanner does not ever make me aware of my experiences themselves, by what other means does it furnish me with knowledge that I have them?”

This is a good question indeed. Naturally we can gain a serious amount of fact-awareness without being aware of any objects at all. I can come to believe that there is a dark side of the moon, not by being aware of the moon’s dark side, but because someone informs me about this. The relevant question here is however; can we become perceptually fact-aware of something while not being aware of anything? Can we become perceptually aware that an object has certain properties while not being perceptually aware of the object? – Yes, by being aware of something else, what Dretske and Tye refer to as “displaced perception. If the introspective scanner makes the subject aware that she has a certain experience by making her aware of some other object, what would that object be? The only suggestion I can come up with is that the objects the subject is aware of are external objects. That would however mean that the introspective scanner does not monitor the mind, but the external world and that the higher order perception theory collapses into a one-level theory à la Dretske or Shoemaker.

12 Lycan 2003, p. 25.
I have tried to show that the only plausible interpretation of “watching inner representations” is “perceiving facts about them by being aware of what they represent” which is not at all a higher order theory of consciousness. There just does not seem to be any understanding of being perceptually aware of x that does not require that what we are aware of are the intrinsic properties of x.

References


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