

24.500/Phil253 topics in philosophy of mind/perceptual experience



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plan

- no class next week
- Chomsky et al. @ Harvard @ 4pm
- Schwitzgebel on Titchener
- Schwitzgebel on shoes

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Photograph of Schwitzgebel.



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Introspection Titchener characterizes as the observation of conscious processes, or the attention to and noting of such processes...I myself am drawn to a similar view of introspection, according to which it is a species of attention to conscious experience (ITAD, 59)

- restricted to conscious experience (beliefs etc. are introspectible in the general sense)

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- <http://www.faculty.ucr.edu/~eschwitz/SchwitzPapers/TitchDemo030417.htm>



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And, in general, that which makes the sensation of blue a mental fact seems to escape us: it seems, if I may use a metaphor, to be transparent—we look through it and see nothing but the blue; we may be convinced that there is something but what it is no philosopher, I think, has yet clearly recognised. (Moore, ‘The Refutation of Idealism’)

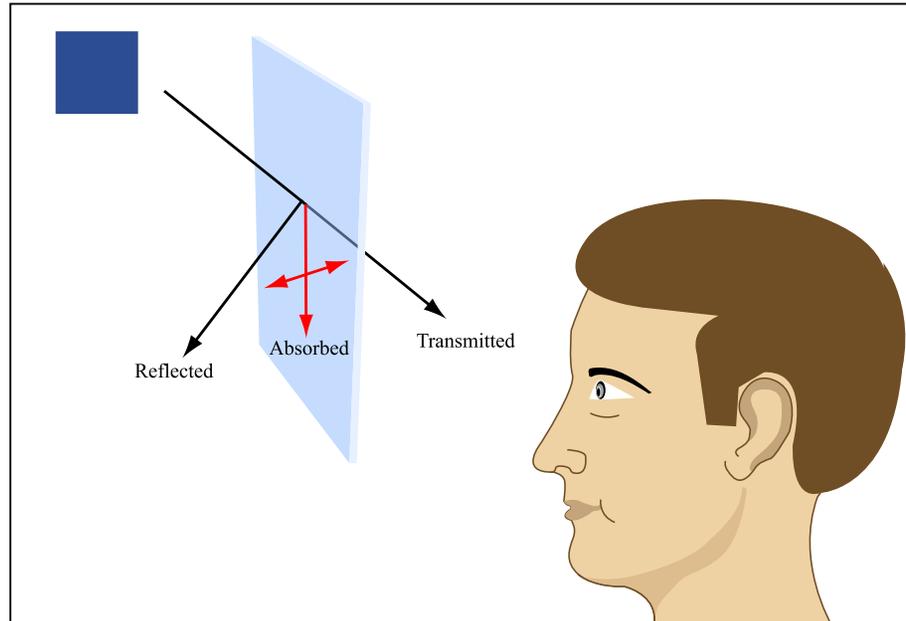


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the moment we try to fix our attention upon consciousness and to see what, distinctly, it is, it seems to vanish: it seems as if we had before us a mere emptiness. When we try to introspect the sensation of blue, all we can see is the blue: the other element is as if it were diaphanous.

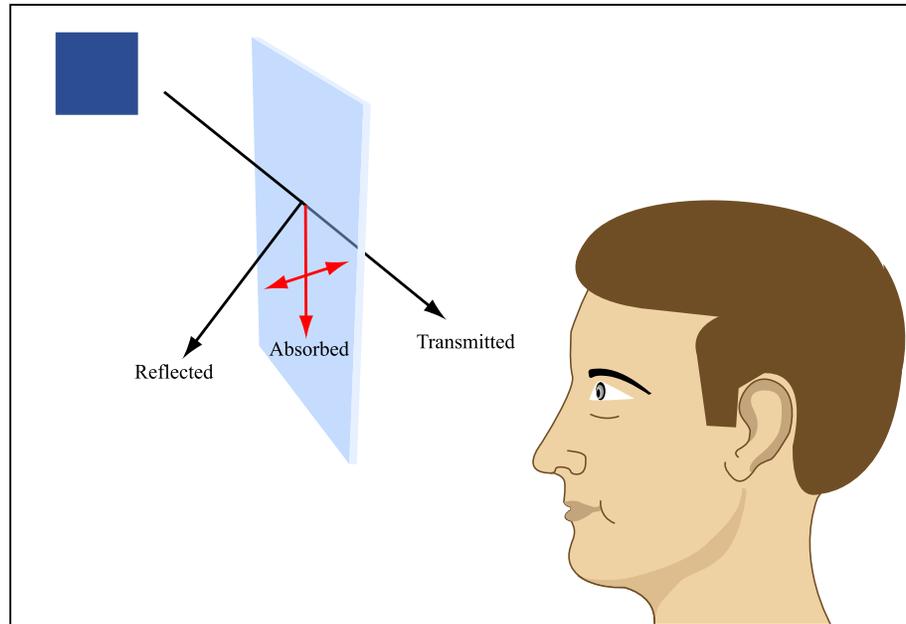
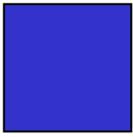


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Intuitively, you are directly aware of blueness and squareness as...features of an external surface. Now shift your gaze inward and try to become aware of your experience itself, inside you, apart from its objects. Try to focus your attention on some intrinsic feature of the experience that distinguishes it from other experiences, something other than what it is an experience of. The task seems impossible: one's awareness seems always to slip through the experience to blueness and squareness, as instantiated together in an external object. In turning one's mind inward to attend to the experience, one seems to end up concentrating on what is outside again, on external features or properties. (Tye, *Ten Problems...*)

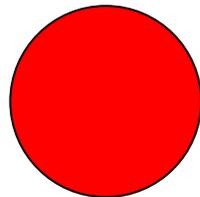


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Figure by MIT OCW.

Suppose you are facing a white wall, on which you see a bright red, round patch of paint. Suppose you are attending closely to the color and shape of the patch as well as the background. Now turn your attention from what you see out there in the world before you to your visual experience. Focus upon your awareness of the patch as opposed to the patch of which you are aware. Do you find yourself suddenly acquainted with new qualities, qualities that are intrinsic to your visual experience in the way that redness and roundness are qualities intrinsic to the patch of paint? According to some philosophers, the answer to this question is a resounding 'No'. As you look at the patch, you are aware of certain features out there in the world. When you turn your attention inwards to your experience of those features, you are aware that you are having an experience of a certain sort but you are aware of the very same features; no new features of your experience are revealed. In this way, your visual experience is transparent or diaphanous. (Tye, *Qualia*, SEP)



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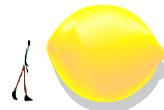


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Eloise is aware of the tree as a tree that she is now seeing. So, we can suppose she is aware of some features of her current visual experience. In particular, she is aware that her visual experience has the feature of being an experience of seeing a tree. That is to be aware of an intentional feature of her experience; she is aware that her experience has a certain content. On the other hand, I want to argue that she is not aware of those intrinsic features of her experience by virtue of which it has that content. (Harman, 'The intrinsic quality of experience')

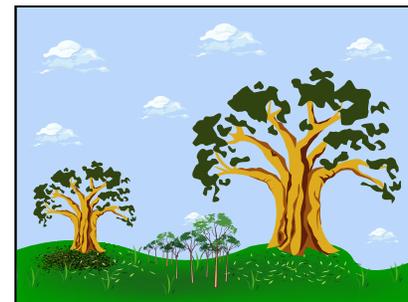


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some 'transparency' theses

1. one cannot attend to (or be aware of) one's (current, visual) experience
 - setting aside brain scanners etc.
2. one cannot attend to (or be aware of) 'intrinsic features' of one's experience
3. one can only know about intentional/representational features of one's experience, not its intrinsic features
 - (3) plausibly implies (2) but not conversely
 - 'transparency' is (something along the lines of) 1&2&3

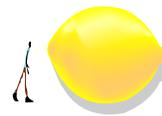


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- it seems to be assumed that experiences are particulars (specifically events), otherwise talk of ‘intrinsic features’ makes little sense
- but then (3) is puzzling, because it seems to imply that we can’t even know that our experience has temporal properties (lasts for more than 5 seconds, say)
- and if we can’t, why think we have experiences at all?
- on the other hand, if we can, why are other[?] ‘intrinsic features’ off limits?

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- n.b. don't confuse this sense of 'transparency' with Moran's (no doubt related) sense:

With respect to the attitude of belief, the claim of transparency tells us that the first-person question "Do I believe P?" is "transparent" to, answered in the same way as, the outward-directed question as to the truth of P itself.
(Moran, *Authority and Estrangement*)



- modulo unclarities in the statement of transparency, Titchener's methods seem to illustrate it
- 'introspective psychology' is (ironically) not interestingly introspective
- the 'introspectors' are attending to (apparent) external stimuli and their (apparent) properties
- the 'introspective' training is extrospective training



Figure by MIT OCW.

Let's back up a bit, though, and ask: Are students in this experiment really introspecting? In my experience, attempting to discern a combination tone feels no different from attempting to discern a faint tone of the ordinary sort. It feels just like listening for sounds in the external environment. One could presumably develop substantial expertise in discerning combination tones without ever taking oneself to be introspectively reporting one's own mental states. (64)

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One might hope to defend the view that the training is nonetheless introspective on the grounds that combination tones, being (in general opinion) an artifact of the ear, do not exist in the world in the same way that ordinary tones do, and thus that in attending to them one cannot be attending to the outside world. Since it sounds odd to say that one is attending to one's ear, it is easy to suppose that one must be attending to some part of one's experience, that is to say, introspecting. However, this argument would prove too much. If every sensory or perceptual feature that does not exist outside the observer is introspectively discovered, then many illusions are discoverable only by introspection. (64-5)

- why does the argument ‘prove too much’?
- the color adaptation example is no more convincing as a case of non-introspective attention than the original tone example

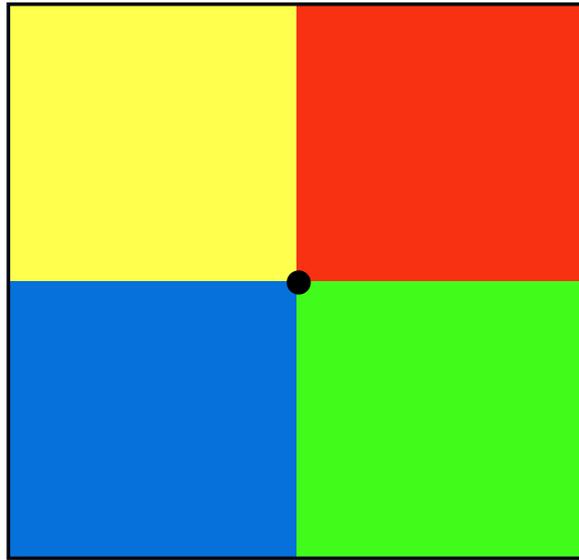


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Auditory experience is far too complex for ordinary people to parse. Thus, a new student entering Titchener's laboratory, asked to describe her auditory experience with care and in detail, would be baffled. To provide introspective reports of any value, she needs concepts and a vocabulary, a sense of what to look for, and practice in discerning these aspects of her experience as it occurs. Training in the recognition of combination tones is thus introspective training not because reporting such tones is necessarily an introspective act but because for the person antecedently interested in introspectively attending to her own auditory experience, the training provides a way of identifying and labelling one aspect of it. (65)



- how does that address the worry, which was that ‘introspective training’ does not involve ‘attention to conscious experience’?
- ES seems to concede this point
- after the training, someone who is ‘antecedently interested in introspectively attending to her own auditory experience’ will have some new ‘concepts and a vocabulary’ (n.b. pertaining to sounds, not to ‘experiences’), but how does that help?



Figure by MIT OCW.

- in any case, attention to external stimuli (and so ‘introspective training’) does change the appearance of those stimuli
- it therefore does not reveal what one’s ‘experience’ was like all along
- Carrasco et al., Attention alters appearance, *Nature Neuroscience* 2004
 - mentioned by Block last week

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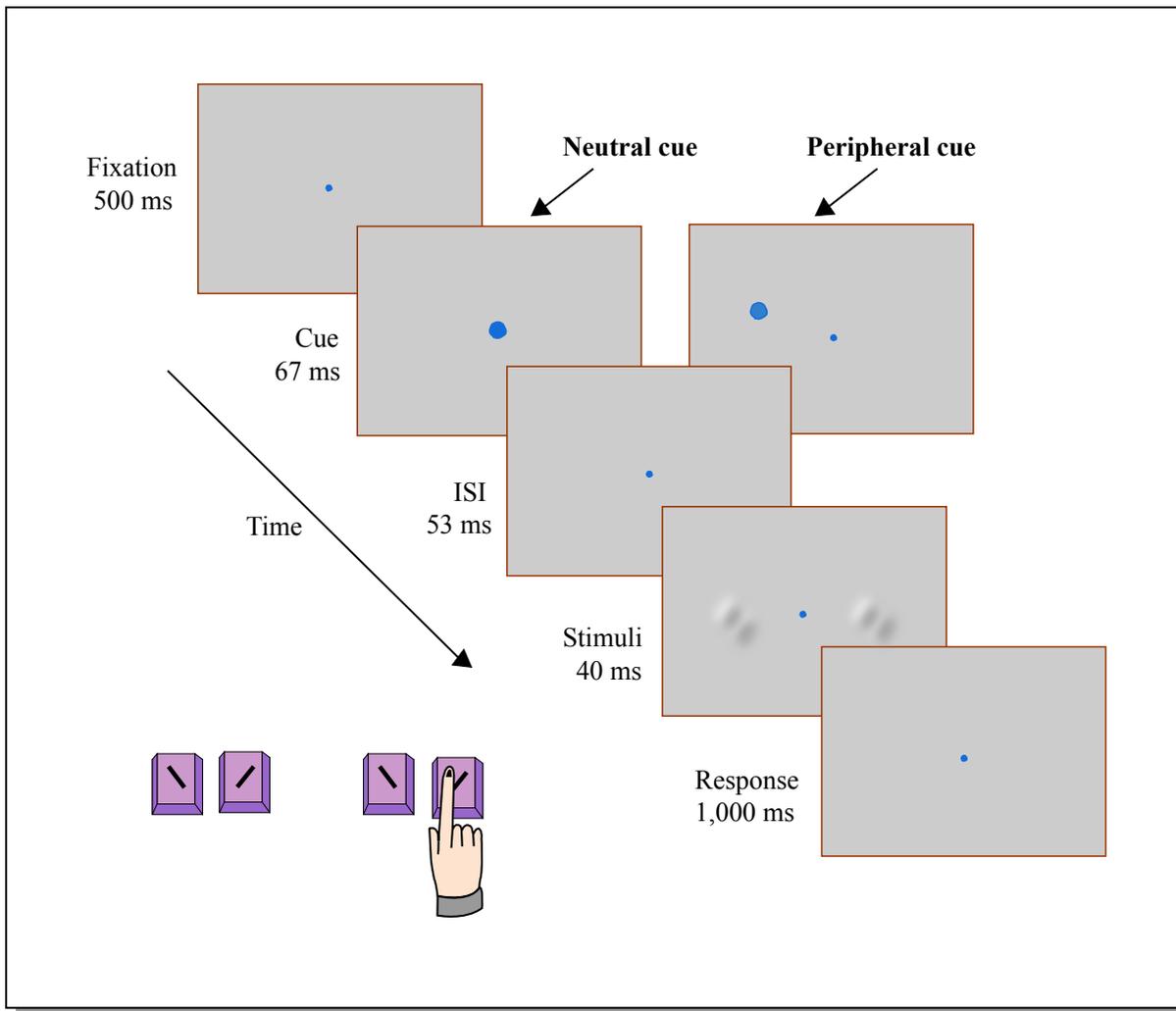


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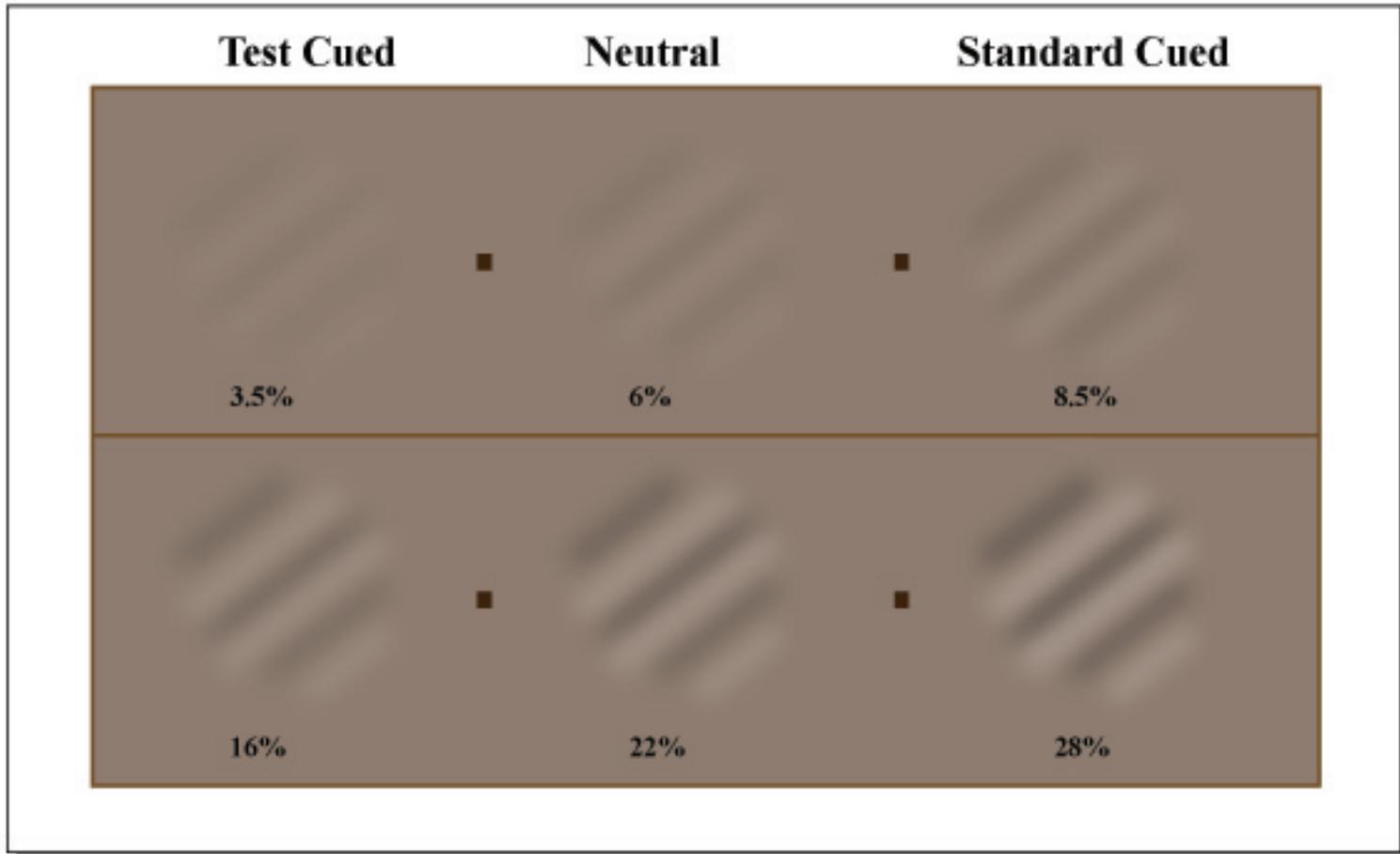


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- http://viscog.beckman.uiuc.edu/djs_lab/demos.html



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