



BRILL

# What is Negative Disjunctivism?

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## Abstract

Negative disjunctivists like Mike Martin and Bill Fish understand hallucinations in purely epistemic terms, and do not attribute phenomenal character to these visual misfires. However, the approaches by Martin and Fish are importantly different, and there has been little systematic work on how negative disjunctivism is motivated. In this paper, I argue for a version of negative disjunctivism that centers on the idea that perception involves the exercise of a fallible self-conscious capacity. I claim that this at once explains hallucinations in purely negative terms that are close to Martin's approach, while at the same time providing negative disjunctivism with an explanatory basis that Fish attempts to provide and Martin's view lacks.

## Keywords

negative disjunctivism – hallucination – phenomenology – self-knowledge

## 1 Introduction

For “negative” disjunctivists hallucinations do not have phenomenal character, and are merely epistemically indistinguishable from ordinary perceptual states.<sup>1</sup> In this respect, negative disjunctivism is a little-understood view. *Prima facie*, it simply seems highly unintuitive to claim that hallucinations lack phenomenal character and indeed that no positive independent characterization

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1 This view is sometimes also called the “epistemic” approach to hallucination, but since it is important to distinguish the present topic from epistemological disjunctivism, I will in this paper use the term “negative disjunctivism.”

can be provided of hallucinations. In this paper I will discuss the views of arguably the two most prominent negative disjunctivists: M.G.F. Martin (2006) and William Fish (2009). As I will argue, while Martin and Fish hold similar views, there is nevertheless a critical difference between the two: while Martin maintains a fully negative approach to hallucinations, Fish introduces a more constructive element. While I will argue that among these two only Martin's view is consistent, I also argue that without further theoretical underpinning Martin's negative disjunctivism cannot successfully overcome the intuitive problems that cling to the view. In turn, I provide this theoretical underpinning. The key lies in considering perception as one of the subject's *capacities*, and in turn to take perception as a non-defective exercise and hallucination as a defective exercise of this capacity. I argue that this framework is both consistent and provides a compelling theoretical development of negative disjunctivism.

In Sections 2 and 3, I introduce disjunctivism, as well the so-called "screening off" worries that initially motivate negative disjunctivism. In Sections 4 and 5, I introduce Fish's and Martin's versions of negative disjunctivism, and I argue that both face difficulties. Specifically, in Section 6, I introduce the central problem that A.D. Smith has raised for negative versions of disjunctivism, namely to appropriately distinguish hallucinations from other failures of the perceptual apparatus. In Section 7, I introduce the capacity-view that I take to resolve the relevant difficulties, characterizing perception as a fallible self-conscious capacity. In Section 8, I conclude.

## 2 Disjunctivism and the "Screening-Off" Problem

Take "naïve realism" as a position on the nature of veridical perception characterized by the following two claims:

Claim 1: veridical perception is *a relation* to the objects of perception, such that the phenomenal character of each token veridical perception is constitutively dependent on its objects.

Claim 2: the objects of veridical perception are *mind-independent*.

These two claims entail a typical naïve realist characterization of perceptual experience such as the following by Mike Martin:

No instance of the specific kind of experience I have now, when seeing the white picket fence for what it is, could occur were I not to perceive such a mind-independent object as this.

2006: 358

As Martin notes, for the naïve realist perception is constitutively dependent on its mind-independent objects, and therefore no experience lacking a relation to such mind-independent objects could qualify as belonging to this kind.

Classically, naïve realism must provide a response to the argument from hallucination:<sup>2</sup>

- Premise 1: It is possible to suffer hallucinations indiscriminable from veridical perceptions.<sup>3</sup>
- Premise 2: A hallucination constitutes the same kind of visual experience as a veridical perception. (This premise is sometimes called the ‘Common Kind Assumption’ (CKA)).<sup>4</sup>
- Premise 3: A hallucination does not constitute a relation to mind-independent objects, i.e., it is not constitutively dependent on mind-independent objects.
- Conclusion: A veridical perception does not constitute a relation to mind-independent objects, i.e., it is not constitutively dependent on mind-independent objects.

Were this argument sound, the naïve realist would have to abandon one of her two claims. However, naïve realists are disjunctivists: they deny the second premise in the argument, i.e., CKA (Martin 2006: 361). While some form of disjunctivism is common to all naïve realists, in this paper my focus is on a specific type of disjunctivist response: the type of *negative* disjunctivism that holds not merely that hallucinations are a different kind of experiential mental state than a veridical perception, but also hold that this type of mental state cannot be given an independent, positive characterization, and specifically

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2 Martin himself phrases the argument slightly differently (2006: 358), focusing not just on the possibility of hallucinations that are indiscriminable from veridical perceptions, but also on the possibility of hallucinations with the same proximate causes as veridical perceptions (i.e., hallucinations in cases in which an agent’s neurological/psychological circumstances are configured as they would be in a case of veridical perception, yet without being caused to be so-configured by the objects of perception). However, for purposes of this paper I will take the fallibility at issue to be more general than a particular causal scenario.

3 Where following Martin, “the relevant conception of what it is for one thing to be indiscriminable from another is that of not possibly knowing it to be distinct from the other” (Martin 2006: 364).

4 This follows M.G.F. Martin’s rendering of the context (e.g., 2006: 362). For Martin it is important that this concerns the same “*most specific kind*”, which serves to acknowledge the fact that of course hallucinations and veridical perceptions can harmlessly share some quite general common kind, say that of “visual experiences” (which Martin [2006: 364] thinks they do in fact share). For sake of convenience, I shall throughout most of this paper drop the qualifier “most specific” and talk simply in terms of “the same kind.”

cannot be credited with its own phenomenal character. Accordingly, therefore, hallucinations are not taken to be states that bear an identical phenomenal character to a corresponding perception. Rather, the proper characterization of a hallucination is merely that it is a state that is not such that a subject can distinguish it from a veridical perception. In Martin's terms, this is "a brute modal condition": a simple fact about the nature of hallucinations that does not rest on a more positive explanation (2013: 45).

To understand this maneuver, which has struck even philosophers otherwise sympathetic to disjunctivism as counterintuitive, we need to appreciate how the negative disjunctivist understands the argumentative context of the argument from hallucination. The claim is that CKA expresses a fairly specific threat to our understanding of perceptual knowledge. In Martin's analysis, this concerns a threat to our intuitive self-conception of perceptual knowledge.<sup>5</sup> On this self-conception, perceptual experience has a *revelatory* character: from the perspective of the perceptual subject, experience seems to put the subject in touch with material objects and properties. CKA appears to rule this out: if hallucinations and perceptual experiences are to be explained in terms of a common kind, then mind-independent objects and properties cannot figure in these experiences. According to Martin, this confounds our natural self-understanding of perceptual knowledge. The worry, as Barry Stroud has described it, is that visual experience constitutes "a barrier between ourselves and the world around us [...] a veil of sensory experiences or sensory objects which we could not penetrate but which would be no reliable guide to the world beyond the veil" (1984: 32–33).

It is significant to note this point because it equips this version of disjunctivism with motivations that are in a sense both weaker and stronger than one might have thought, and than other versions of disjunctivism. The view is weaker than (perhaps) expected because it explicitly disavows ambitions of resolving other skeptical worries. For example, Martin expressly indicates that even on the assumption of disjunctivism, perceptions and hallucinations are indiscriminable, and therefore there remains a question how the subject can distinguish her situation from a hallucination (2006: 96–97). On the other hand, this variety of disjunctivism is strong in the following sense: it insists on vindicating the supposedly natural conception of perceptual knowledge—viz. perception revealing mind-independent objects and properties. This point will

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5 In Martin's formulation, the threat is "to falsify our beliefs about how we come to know what we take ourselves to know" (2006: 396). The notion that the relevant issue concerns our *self*-conception of perceptual knowledge is an issue to which I will return below (Section 7).

be significant below in understanding the motivation for the distinctly negative approach to hallucinations.<sup>6</sup>

For a disjunctivist, hallucinations are relevantly different from veridical perceptions. To this claim, the negative disjunctivist adds that nothing positive can be said about the character of hallucinations, and specifically, that hallucinations do not have their own phenomenal character. Why weigh down the disjunctivist view with what seems like this excessively austere commitment? The answer lies in what has come to be known as the “screening off” worry. This worry derives from a bit of reasoning about the shape that a positive account of hallucinations must take. Such an account describes in independent terms the nature of the sort of visual experiences that hallucinations constitute. There is, however, a constraint on such an explanation: hallucinations are indiscriminable from veridical perceptions. Accordingly, no account of the nature of hallucinations can include in an agent’s awareness of a hallucination any element that would distinguish it, for that agent, from a veridical perception. But then it seems ensured that any positive account of hallucinations falls into a model on which hallucinations and veridical perceptions share a significant common kind: the two experiences are identical to the extent that the agent lacks epistemic access to items that may differentiate the experiences. *Ex hypothesi*, therefore, any differences between hallucinations and perceptions fall outside the sphere of the type of awareness that the subject can exploit to distinguish the experiences. But then disjunctivism has collapsed into a view antithetical to its aims: subjective experience seems, once more, incapable of revealing mind-independent objects.

### 3 Negative Disjunctivisms

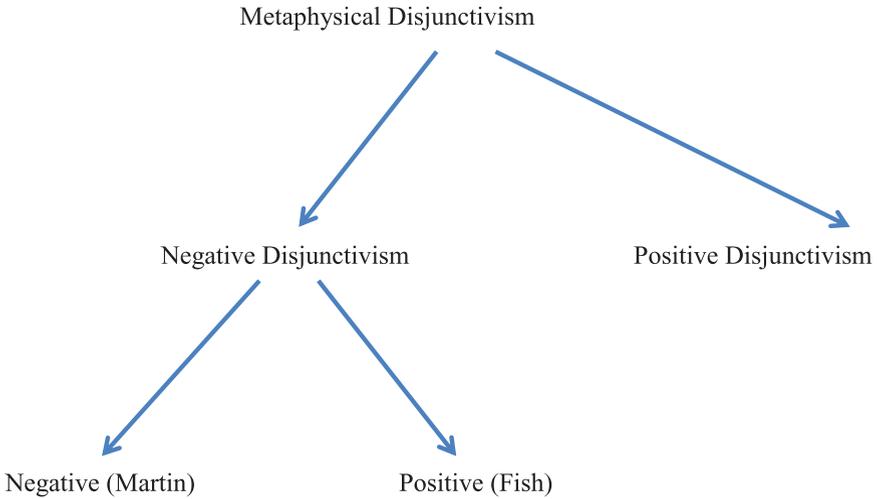
In its general shape, the negative response to this worry consists in two components: (i) a diagnosis (and rejection) of the motive for providing a positive account of hallucinations; (ii) a characterization of hallucination merely in terms of their epistemic relation to perceptions. However, here there is no consensus among negative disjunctivists on how precisely to fill out (i) and (ii). Here I will focus on accounts provided by M.G.F Martin and William Fish, arguably the two most prominent developments of negative disjunctivism.

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<sup>6</sup> For a dispute with the claim that naïve realism (uniquely) captures something intuitive about perceptual knowledge, see Pautz (2013). My current interest is not in this question, but in how to accommodate naïve realism.

The contrast between the two accounts will set up what I consider the most satisfactory version of the view.

In what is bound to confuse a clear view of the dialectic, there is an important sense in which Fish’s and Martin’s approaches can be characterized as, respectively, “positive” and “negative” approaches to the version of disjunctivism that we have been discussing. That is, the argumentative context looks as follows:



The element that opposes Martin’s and Fish’s approaches concerns the explanatory status of hallucinations—their indiscriminability from veridical perceptions.<sup>7</sup> Martin is insistent this should be understood as a primitive epistemic condition: the fundamental way of characterizing hallucinations. By contrast, Fish accepts the need to ground this epistemic feature in a more substantive characterization of hallucinations. Specifically, Fish characterizes hallucinations as mental states that have identical cognitive effects to corresponding veridical perceptions, but lack their phenomenal character.<sup>8</sup> To avoid confusion, for the rest of this paper I will refer to Martin’s version of the view as entirely negative or “bare” negative disjunctivism, and to Fish’s version of the view as “constructive” negative disjunctivism.

7 Of course, Martin and Fish concur that metaphysically hallucinations do not have phenomenal character; this is what places both views within the fold of negative disjunctivism.

8 Martin (2013) understands this feature of Fish’s account as intended to serve *instead* of the epistemic notion of indiscriminability. The dialectic between the two views will become clear below.

My aim in the rest of this paper is to argue that, as advocated by their authors, neither version of negative disjunctivism is quite satisfactory, and that a specific further development of the view is required to ameliorate the situation. In service of this argument, I will start in the next section with the problem faced by Fish's "constructive" negative disjunctivism, before turning to Martin's "bare" approach.

#### 4 Fish: Return of the "Screening Off" Worry

In his concise but rich monograph *Perception, Hallucination, and Illusion*, William Fish discusses Martin's view and develops a negative version of disjunctivism that on broad lines follows Martin's ideas, with a few critical divergences from Martin's negative orthodoxy. The focus of this section will be the criticisms of Fish's view developed in Martin (2013), and specifically Martin's core claim that Fish's divergences from negative orthodoxy entail a return of the "screening-off" worry—part of what motivates the austerity of negative disjunctivism in the first place. While in this way the present section serves to illustrate why Martin's view is to be preferred over Fish's, the next section will reveal (not-coincidentally converse) problems in Martin's own articulation of the negative character of his disjunctivism.

Fish's disjunctivism starts from his preferred version of a naïve realist view of perception. On Fish's view, ordinary perceptual situations place the subject in relation to "facts": referent-level combinations of objects and properties.<sup>9</sup> In turn, Fish's disjunctivism is negative: hallucinations do not share the phenomenal character of veridical perceptions. However, unlike Martin, Fish accepts the need to ground the apparent perceptual character of hallucinations in something more constructive than Martin's brutally negative fact of indiscernibility. For Fish, rather, "a mental state will count as indistinguishable from a veridical perception of a certain kind, regardless of the intrinsic properties that mental state may or may not possess, so long as it has the same cognitive effects as a veridical perception of that kind" (2013: 59). In other words, there *is* a positive factor that is common between hallucinations and perceptions: it is just not their phenomenal character, but their cognitive effects.

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9 In this aspect Fish's account of "facts" is sometimes characterized as Russellian. This contrasts with views on which facts are true judgments, i.e., consist of items located on the level of Fregean sense. While I have doubts about the idea of "object-property" referent-level combinations, I will not pursue this objection to Fish here.

Uncontroversially, Fish's account is not without its foibles. As Martin notes, Fish will have to do some work to rule-in fringe cases in which a hallucination occurs in a subject incapable of further cognition (e.g., a comatose patient). Moreover, many philosophers attribute to perception cognitive effects that are exclusive to veridical perception (for example, certain *de re* beliefs may be supported only by sensory experiences that actually involve the presence of objects the beliefs concern). However, assuming the relevant adjustments, the account Fish proposes faces a more profound difficulty: the re-appearance of the "screening off" worry. As Martin argues, by its nature Fish's account threatens to "screen off" the explanatory importance of genuine phenomenal character. After all, *ex hypothesi* the cognitive benefits of perceptual states will not exceed those of hallucinations. But then distinctly perceptual features are cognitively epiphenomenal. This is antithetical to the aims of naïve realism.<sup>10</sup>

A related problem in Fish's view appears when we consider some of Fish's reflections on the topic of knowledge of experience; that is, the subject's access to her own experience.<sup>11</sup> According to many philosophers, perceptions have a type of "felt reality": a certain feel of making the environment present to the subject.<sup>12</sup> On this topic, Howard Robinson has argued that any advantage veridical perceptions are supposed to have in explaining the "felt reality" of perceptual experience must be empty (1994: 51).<sup>13</sup> After all, Robinson argues, whatever explains the felt reality of hallucinations, the same explanation will apply to veridical perceptions. Resisting this claim, Fish writes the following:

Hallucinations have a felt reality because, when we hallucinate, we take ourselves to be perceiving, *and perceptions themselves have a felt reality*. And, of course, the explanation of the felt reality of veridical perception cannot be an explanation of the same kind or we would be locked in a regress

FISH 2009: 109–110, QUOTED BY MARTIN 2013: 45.

Fish's claim in this passage is that any felt reality in hallucinations is parasitic on the felt reality of veridical perceptions. As Fish says, the reason hallucinations have a felt reality is precisely that a hallucinating subject takes herself to

10 As Martin puts the point: "Hasn't Fish preserved the distinctiveness of veridical perception at the cost of making its distinctive elements entirely causally or explanatory redundant? Well, this is the so-called 'screening off' problem" (2013: 43–44).

11 The context of this discussion I take from Martin (2013: 44ff).

12 See, e.g., Chudnoff (2012, 2013).

13 I return to this notion of "felt reality" below.

be *perceiving*. However, as Martin correctly points out, it is not immediately clear what entitles Fish to this position. The problem is that if Fish takes “felt reality” to be part of the phenomenal character of experience, then it seems merely an assumption from Fish that only perceptions can have this aspect of phenomenal character. By contrast, if Fish takes “felt reality” to be a meta-perceptual cognitive state, then it seems at odds with Fish’s position to deny that perception and hallucinations share “felt reality” equally. In sum, on the topic of this supposed characteristic of veridical perceptions—their “felt reality”—Fish faces an instance of the problem that confronts his position more systematically: the positive characteristics that he attributes to non-veridical perceptions threaten to “screen off” the specific characteristics that are supposed to adhere to veridical perceptions, and thereby place in jeopardy the value of his disjunctivism.

## 5 Martin: “Bare” Negative Disjunctivism

The above reflections show that there is something philosophically substantial about Martin’s mere or “bare” negative approach to hallucinations. Arguably—at least, this is Martin’s own view—it is critical to negative disjunctivism that hallucinations are understood *merely* derivatively from veridical perceptions. In this section, I detail Martin’s thinking, and in the subsequent section, I raise a difficulty that results directly from Martin’s austerely negative approach.

In order to understand Martin’s view, it is helpful to note three types of facts that are commonly discerned in comparing hallucinations and veridical perceptions: (1) facts about the external world, (2) facts about the state one is in, e.g., a perceptual or a hallucinatory state, and (3) facts concerning the phenomenology of one’s experience, how things appear to one. Veridically perceiving subjects are forming correct judgments about all three of these matters of fact. They see the world clearly; they take themselves to be properly perceiving (as they are); and they obviously have no problem making out the phenomenology of their experience, how things seem to them.

By contrast, how should we understand hallucinating subjects? Uncontroversially, hallucinating subjects fail on the first two counts: they take the world to be some way that in fact it is not, and presumably they take themselves to be veridically perceiving, while in fact they are hallucinating. However, it might well seem natural to still suppose that hallucinating subjects succeed on the third matter of fact. Hallucinating subjects may be wrong about the external world, and wrong about their own state, but surely they are not wrong about the appearance they are confronted with, i.e., the fact

that something *seems* to them to be the case. On Martin's analysis, this last point underlies positive accounts of hallucinations. If hallucinating subjects are correct about how things appear to them, then we can describe these correct judgments (and thus the facts in this area) in independent, positive terms. Moreover, if hallucinating subjects are indeed accurately observing how things are to them phenomenally, then hallucinating and veridically perceiving subjects will not just both come to correct judgments about this third type of fact; they will also come to the *same* judgments. After all, on this understanding the very reason hallucinating subjects are mistaken about the first two matters of fact is that the third sort of fact is the same for hallucinating and veridically perceiving subjects, while the two are actually in very different states and circumstances.<sup>14</sup>

Martin's negative alternative to the above model centers on the following idea: it is a mistake to think of facts of the third sort as independent from the subject's higher-perspective on it, i.e., the type of perspective that the subject occupies in passing judgment on facts of the first two sorts. As Martin himself puts it, the idea to be rejected is one according to which:

adopting [a] higher-order perspective on one's phenomenal consciousness, coming to be self-aware and attentive of it, is thereby to put oneself in a position to acquire knowledge of something independent of this perspective. [That] in coming to make judgments about how things phenomenally appear to one, one makes judgments about a subject-matter that obtains independently.

2006: 379

Martin's thought here can be understood in terms of a contrast between perceptual awareness and self-awareness or "introspective" awareness. In the case of perception, we pick up on facts that are independent of the functioning of the cognitive mechanism by means of which we pick up on these facts. The observable fact that *p* does not depend on the sensory relation I bear to it. By contrast, Martin suggests this is not the case for self-awareness: "introspection" does not reveal phenomenological facts that are fully independent of the introspective perspective. For Martin, we should reject the idea that "we can fix the facts of phenomenal consciousness independently of the higher-perspective on it, in as much as we think of the latter as correctly reporting these additional facts" (2006: 402).

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14 Only in the veridical case does the third matter of fact correspond in the proper way to the subject's state and circumstances, viz. the first two matters of fact.

As discussion in the previous paragraph shows, Martin's view essentially involves an approach to self-awareness. As Martin himself makes explicit, "there [is] something at the heart of the problem [of perception], something which is rarely made fully articulate in discussion of it [...] that the more fundamental problem here is one concerning our *knowledge of our own minds*" (2000: 198; italics mine). To illustrate his understanding of (the relevant form of) self-awareness, then, Martin invokes some familiar observations concerning the seems/is distinction. In the case of perceptual knowledge, if our cognitive apparatus is not functioning properly, it delivers us things that seem to be the case but are in fact not. The familiar point is that this does not apply to (certain) features of qualitative consciousness: to genuinely seem to be in pain just is to be in pain; and likewise, to genuinely seem to be having a phenomenal experience of red just is to have a phenomenal experience of red. In Martin's words, the nature of self-awareness rules out that "how things seem introspectively will not be how things are phenomenally" (2006: 397).

Grounded in this observation, Martin reasons as follows. Given the absence of a seems/is distinction concerning phenomenal awareness, we are left with two options. Perhaps our cognitive access to phenomenal reality is infallible. However, Martin questions the notion of an infallible cognitive mechanism. The very idea that a state of knowledge requires a functioning mechanism would seem to imply the possibility of failure.<sup>15</sup> The alternative is to deny that the sort of position the subject occupies in a hallucination, i.e., a position in which she is misguided about her environment and her own status as a perceptual subject, is a position from which she correctly accesses phenomenal realities. For Martin, hallucinations are states in which subjects are confused into taking themselves to be perceiving, and equally confused in taking themselves to be confronted with a certain phenomenal reality. As Martin puts the idea, hallucinations are not "a matter of us seemingly being related to the world but failing to be so, but rather being a certain way which we might also confuse with being perceptually related" (2006: 374).

Accordingly, for Martin hallucinations are thorough confusions: not merely confusions that things are some way in the environment, but equally confusions as to what phenomenally *seems* to be the case. Accordingly, the proper characterization of hallucinations is entirely negative: states that are epistemically *deficient* with regard to a specific class of other mental states, viz. perceptual states. As Martin frames his "bare" negative conception:

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<sup>15</sup> The relation between the notion of a cognitive capacity and the notion of fallibility is of course deep. A full treatment of the topic lies beyond the present paper.

[There is] something intrinsically defective or lacking about [hallucinations]. This is made explicit in the thought that while there is a positive specific nature to the veridical perception, there is nothing more to the character of [the hallucination] than that it can't be told apart through reflection from the veridical perception.

2006: 371

## 6 Smith's Challenge

Taking stock, we have so far seen two versions of “negative” disjunctivism: the version by Fish, which understands hallucinations in terms of the cognitive effects they share with veridical perceptions, and the “bare” negative version from Martin—which refuses to characterize hallucinations in any terms other than being indistinguishable from veridical perceptions. We have seen that Fish faces a resurgent “screening-off” worry, yet nevertheless it is not hard to empathize with Fish’s broad leanings, or disjunctivism’s critics for that matter, to the effect that Martin’s approach seems puzzling. Why should there be mental states like hallucinations of which no positive characterization can be given? In this section, I will argue that there is indeed a problem for Martin in this area. Martin’s worry about Fish’s account concerns the correct isolation of hallucinations as a class of mental states, but in effect I will argue Martin faces a similar problem, the solution to which requires a more substantial account of what grounds the negative epistemic fact on which Martin’s account centers.

As discussed above, it is broadly considered intuitive that hallucinating subjects enjoy a sound basis for at least one type of judgment. While the subjects are wrong about the environment and whether they are perceiving, they can correctly describe how things phenomenally *seem* to them. As we have seen, Martin disputes this claim. However, Martin’s analysis misses an important element: the appeal to how things phenomenally seem is, so-to-speak, a loadbearing feature of accounts of hallucination: one that cannot simply be swapped out. The reason for this is that the sense of “seeming” at issue spells out a mode of distinct mode of rationality that is intuitively operative in the hallucinating subject. The point has been trenchantly formulated by A.D. Smith:

To say simply that our [hallucinating] subject is not aware of *anything* is surely to underdescribe this situation dramatically. Perhaps we can make sense of there being ‘mock thoughts’, but can there really be such

a thing as mock sensory awareness? Perhaps there can be ‘an illusion of understanding’, but can there be an illusion of awareness? [...] The sensory features of the situation need to be accounted for [...] If we take as our example subjects who are fully attentive and focused, we need to do justice to the fact that such subjects in some sense take cognizance of, indeed fully attend to, sensory presentations.

2002: 224–225

As Smith here points out, there is a particular difficulty associated with taking a wholly negative approach to the sensory character of perceptual phenomena. For a mere cognitive phenomenon, it may not be difficult to conceive of a *bare* failure: the appearance of understanding, for example, where there is none. However, for a visual phenomenon the situation appears to be different. In a hallucinatory situation, there is *something* the subject is aware of.<sup>16</sup> Or: what would be the notion of *seeming* to be aware of something that would have to be in play if strictly speaking there is nothing visual going on with the subject? As Smith points out, we can make the situation more vivid by contrasting a hallucination to any one of a number of alternative mishaps as may occur in the perceptual-cognitive trajectory—in Smith’s words, phenomena like “post-hypnotic suggestion, gross mental confusion, inattentiveness, jumping the gun and so on.” As Smith correctly notes, these are *different* phenomena than the hallucinations at issue. And what is more: these phenomena are different precisely because they lack a visual element that does seem to characterize hallucinatory awareness.

The upshot of the comparison between these two types of cases is that they involve different modes of perceptual (ir)rationality. Suppose in case A a subject is suffering a hallucination of a pink elephant, while in case B she comes to hold a perceptual belief that there is an elephant before her, but as a consequence, say, of having undergone hypnosis, or suffering from a lapse in mental health. Intuitively, we evaluate the rationality of these cases differently. Intuitively, the hallucinating subject may well seem to be responding rationally to the state she finds herself in: she simply seems confronted with a certain scene, and apparently appropriately responds by judging this scene to be in front of her. Thus, a hallucinating subject need not be seen as in any important sense mentally confused.<sup>17</sup> By contrast, in the second case we are likely

16 One may go as far as to say: in principle, to this “something” the hallucinating subject responds in normal fashion.

17 We can perhaps appreciate this point by briefly considering the paradigmatic Cartesian dream-scenario. Part of the intuitive power in the Cartesian thought-experiment lies in

to judge subjects' incorrect perceptual judgments as signaling some form of mental incoherence. The reason for these differing evaluations, then, would precisely seem that in the hallucinatory case we think there is a certain positively-describable phenomenology confronting the healthy mind, whereas there would seem to be no such phenomenology present to exculpate the subject under hypnosis, or the plainly confused subject.<sup>18</sup>

Martin is aware of the challenge formulated by Smith, and acknowledges that "for the account to be adequate it needs to make sense of the intuitive contrast between a victim of hypnotic suggestion, or mental confusion, and someone genuinely having an hallucination" (2006: 30). However, Martin makes clear he does not seek to answer this challenge the way Smith presumes it must be answered, viz. by *some* positively described type of hallucinatory awareness. Since Martin's alternative solution is far from immediately clear, and since the topic is important and intricate, it is worth citing at some length:

We can now see how the disjunctivist will answer [Smith's] challenge. In such cases, while there may be grounds for the particular individual why he or she will fail to know of the difference between the situation that he or she is in, and the visual perception of a white picket fence, it won't follow from this alone that his or her situation is objectively, or impersonally, indiscriminable from a veridical perception. We intuitively track the

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the fact that I, with the mental health I attribute to myself, could currently be suffering the Cartesian dream, simply by being confronted with the associated phenomenal state. At the same time, this is not to say, of course, that the potency of the Cartesian scenario depends on its applicability to mentally healthy subjects. A similar scenario departing from a certain mental disorder that does not allow those afflicted by it to distinguish their situations from veridical perceptions could, seemingly, do the job as well.

- 18 Will Martin accept this distinction? Sometimes Martin makes it seem as though the *mere* fact that the subject is disposed to judge that she is perceiving entails that the case is hallucination-like. This might seem to be the upshot of the following passage:

That there is something that it is like for a subject [i.e., that the state is hallucination-like] is given by the fact that we are characterizing how things seem to them, namely that they seem in just the way they would seem to him or her were he or she veridically perceiving a white picket fence. What more could be required in order to specify a way that one can be experientially?

2006: 400 On one interpretation, Martin's point here is that saying about a subject that it seems to them that they are perceiving is all one can say about a state being hallucinatory. But this is wrong, since it equivocates on "seems." The confused subject "seems" to be perceiving, but not in the way the hallucinating subject seems to be perceiving. Arguably, therefore, this is not what Martin means. Instead, there is a more objective fact about whether "[things] seem to them, namely that they seem in just the way they would seem to him or her were he or she veridically perceiving."

difference in contrasting how we imagine things to be presented to them, or how we conceive it as not being presented, with the individual's failure to appreciate that difference. The contrast between a case in which the subject fails to distinguish their situation from one of perceiving the picket fence and one in which their situation is such that it is impersonally indiscriminable from one of perceiving makes space for just this contrast. However, as we already remarked to highlight the difference in these terms is not to answer the challenge in the way that Smith supposes the intuitive one. According to him the only plausible answer is to say that the difference between the two kinds of case turns simply on the presence or absence of phenomenal consciousness, independent of any facts about what is or is not knowably different about the case.

2006: 384

Martin starts the passage by granting the distinction on which Smith insists. As Martin notes, cases like mental confusion and the sort show that “there may be grounds for [a] particular individual why he or she will fail to know of the difference between the situation that he or she is in, and the visual perception of a white picket fence.” However, as Martin grants, from such grounds alone it does “not follow [...] that his or her situation is objectively, or impersonally, indiscriminable from a veridical perception.” In other words, Smith is right to insist on distinguishing hallucinations from various other types of mental dysfunction. Equally, Martin makes clear that acceptance of *this* point of Smith's does not mean acceptance of Smith's conclusion that the “only plausible answer is to say that the difference between the two kinds of case turns simply on the presence or absence of phenomenal consciousness.” What is Martin's alternative? As the above formulation indicates, the core of Martin's conception lies in the *impersonal* or *objective* indistinguishability of a hallucination from an ordinary perceptual experience. Now, it may seem tempting to feel that our discussion is moving in circles. What could make a condition *impersonally* or *objectively* indistinguishable from a veridical perception apart from, well, the two experiences sharing the same phenomenology?<sup>19</sup>

But evidently this is not the idea. Instead, Martin's subsequent discussion makes clear that the relevant contrast is that hallucinations involve a form of “indiscriminability”, of unknowable-distinctness (from a veridical perception, of course), that is not derived from some or other particular fact about the

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19 Consider the “mental motion” you might execute to consider whether or not some conditions A and B are objectively indistinguishable. If you're like me, you check whether or not the same phenomenology appears present.

agent or context, but that is rather part of the experience itself. Here is how Martin puts the idea:

While some talk of the impossibility of acting or sensing in a certain way focuses on the specific limitations that an agent or group of agents may possess, we also have ways of talking about the possibility of doing, sensing or knowing which is not grounded in the specific capacities or incapacities of agents. It is with reference to this notion that the disjunctivist will claim that what [non-disjunctivists] suppose are phenomenally the same are really instances of things not being knowably different.

2006: 384

This notion of indiscriminability is not supposed to derive from a particular incapacity on the part of the subject, but to be more general. As Martin goes on a short while later:

Our ascription of such a psychological state to [...] the individuals involved in Smith's examples does not thereby commit us to these agents possessing any specific psychological capacities or incapacities in respect of the judgments they make over and above the experiential state so ascribed. When we ascribe such a state to someone, the focus is not on the actual psychological states that they go into in response to having an experience [but rather] on the mode of what is to be known about, or what is to be known about itself. It is to talk about the experiential situation.

2006: 384–385

The point of Martin's comments here is that his preferred notion of indiscriminability is not one that concerns the subject's acuity or abilities (or lack thereof): it is *the experience itself* that is unknowably-not a perception. We are therefore not thinking of a subject who in some sense or other—confusion, inattention, mental breakdown—mistakes her experience for a perception, but of a subject suffering an *unknowably non-perceptual* experience.<sup>20</sup> Calling the former “extrinsic” unknowability and the latter “intrinsic” unknowability. Accordingly, Martin's view is that while confusions and other mental errors are “extrinsically” unknowably distinct from veridical perceptions, only hallucinations are intrinsically so.

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20 Of course, in (almost) no case is the issue a literal *mistake*. The relevant phenomenon are states “appearing” to be perceptions, where “appearing” is intended in the broadest possible sense of the word.

How should we evaluate Martin's posture in the face of Smith's challenge? I think we can see the contours of a workable proposal. We can make sense, I think, of the idea that a hallucinatory experience is such that it cannot be distinguished from a veridical experience in a way that is not true for any other perceptual gaffe or mishap. In the case of a hallucination, it lies within the experience to be indiscriminable from perception, not within the agent more generally, or the conditions otherwise. Yet there remains something unsatisfactory: what *grounds* the "intrinsic" indiscriminability of a hallucinatory experience? What *about* the experience makes it such? I do not mean to ask the question what happens to make a hallucination intrinsically indiscriminable in the right way. To this question there may be no satisfactory answer on a philosophical level. But what do I picture when I picture a state that is intrinsically indiscriminable from a perception? The answer cannot be a state with the relevant phenomenology, but then nothing else seems to remain. Indeed, Martin (2013) explicitly speaks of a brute modal epistemic property. But this seems unsatisfying. Perhaps the point may be put like this: negative epistemic modal facts simply are not *brute*. Something in the nature of the mental occurrence that is an hallucination should make intelligible why intrinsically such an experience cannot be differentiated from a perception. At any rate, whether or not this point seems right, we can do better than Martin without tarnishing the substance of his austere negative disjunctivism, and without falling back into the sorts of "screening-off" worries that plague Fish. We can characterize hallucinations no more "positively" or "constructively" than Martin allows, thereby avoiding any attending problems, while nevertheless making the epistemic character of hallucinations intelligible in a way that Martin's view precludes. I turn to this task in the next section.

## 7 Perception as a Fallible Capacity

On the view I will develop perceptual experience involves the exercise of a fallible, self-conscious capacity.<sup>21</sup> This idea contains two elements: the notion of a capacity that is fallible, and the notion of a capacity that is self-conscious.

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21 The account offered here is closest to the one provided in McDowell (2011). Another important account is the one provided by Schellenberg (2018). Schellenberg's view also centers on perceptual capacities, which also equips Schellenberg's view with the ability to distinguish between successful and failed exercises of these capacities. For Schellenberg perceptual capacities are particular-focused, low-level discriminatory capacities. For present purposes, the distinction with McDowell's view is that while Schellenberg emphasizes relatively primitive capacities, McDowell's perceptual capacities bear the self-conscious

I will take each in turn. Capacities are general: they have multiple individual exercises. If a capacity is fallible, this means that it has exercises that do not achieve what the capacity is, in general, a capacity for. Nevertheless, these are still exercises of the same capacity that is, on other occasions, is successful. For example, I may usually succeed in producing a semi-legible rendering of my signature; on occasion that I do not, I fail, but this does not mean that I am doing anything other than exercising my capacity. The conclusion is that we find a particular relation between two types of events: a successful and an unsuccessful exercise of the same capacity. The suggestion, of course, is that perception and hallucination are the relevant equivalents.

For purposes of understanding negative disjunctivism, the more notable idea is that perception is a self-conscious capacity. There is a growing group of views that considers a form of self-awareness to be intimately related to perceptual consciousness.<sup>22</sup> High-order representational theories hold that experiential consciousness requires a type of introspective representation. Self-representational views hold that the representational content of a perceptual experience *itself* contains a representation of the perceptual state. Finally, some philosophers hold that experiential consciousness is *sui generis* self-conscious: experience is *first-order* self-conscious, rather than bearing an object-level to meta-level structure.<sup>23</sup> While this is not the place to develop in detail an account of perceptual self-consciousness, it is clear some view in the area plays a role in Martin's thinking.<sup>24</sup> That is, Martin's view is one on which the subject's "introspective" awareness of the phenomenal character of an experience is not ultimately distinct from the "first-order" facts about this phenomenal character.

The central idea of the proposed negative disjunctivism involves the combination of these two elements. Consider an ordinary veridical perceptual experience, in which the subject is successfully exercising her self-conscious perceptual capacity. In such an experience, the subject is perceiving the scene around her. Moreover, part of such an experience is that the subject enjoys a

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character central to this paper. The reason I don't follow McDowell explicitly in the discussion is that McDowell offers a form of *epistemological* disjunctivism, which lies beyond the scope of this paper.

- 22 In all the views I note, the topic is perceptual consciousness in rational beings specifically. It is a common observation that self-consciousness has a particularly significant role in a rational mind.
- 23 This is the view classically developed at Rödl (2007).
- 24 For example, consider a passage like this: "When I stare at the white picket fence [...] I not only know that there is a white picket fence there, I seem to be in a position to tell how I can know that fact: it is made manifest to me in what I can see" (Martin 2006: 396).

certain *self*-awareness: it seems to her she is perceiving a certain scene, and her experience seems to have a corresponding phenomenal character. Now, given the idea that perception involves the exercise of a *fallible* capacity, the question is how we should understand failed exercises of this capacity. The relevant point here is that if perception involves the exercise of a *self*-conscious capacity, then the consequences of failure may not affect merely what the subject seems to perceive, but also what sort of state she seems to be enjoying self-consciously.<sup>25</sup>

The upshot as compared with Martin's account is as follows. Uncontroversially, a hallucination involves a defective exercise of perceptual capacities. On the current account, this will involve defectiveness not merely in respect of the subject's perceptual beliefs. It will also involve defectiveness in respect of the subject's perspective on her own experience. That is: the subject will seem to be in a perceptual state, and she will seem to experience a state with the corresponding phenomenal character, but this will be part of the defectiveness of the state. Clearly this instantiates Martin's type of negative disjunctivism. To a hallucinating subject it will seem that she is enjoying a perceptual experience with a certain phenomenal character. But this apparent self-awareness is defective in exactly the way that the awareness of her environment is. This is what substantiates the negative claim that nothing more positive can be said about the phenomenal character of hallucinations than that it is to the subject as if she is having a perceptual experience. Accordingly, we can adopt Martin's "bare" negative approach to hallucinations. However, the current view is more substantial: it provides a natural solution to the problem of isolating hallucinations among all mental states. The relevant class of mental states are *failed exercises of the perceptual capacity*. Accordingly, this characterization expressly does not include states like hypnosis or other forms of mental confusion. In sum, the capacity-view provides a substantial development of negative disjunctivism, while at the same time not requiring the sort of positive characterization of hallucinations that raises the specter of "screening off" problems.

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25 This modifies Martin's view in one way. I accept Martin's insight that the decisive characteristic of hallucinations is that they are indiscriminable from veridical perceptions. However, hallucinations are expressly *defective* states of self-consciousness. Accordingly—in contrast with the way Martin sometimes presents the idea—the relation between hallucinations and perceptual states is *not* one between two co-equal mental states that present the same evidential profile to the subject's capacity for self-knowledge. A hallucination as of an *F* is expressly a defective perception of an *F*. By its very nature, therefore, a hallucination of an *F* is a counterpart to the relevant perception—not because it presents the same evidence to the subject, but because the subject is in a dysfunctional state of self-awareness.

To complete illustration of the view, it is helpful to return briefly to Fish's reflections on the "felt reality" of perception. For Fish, the felt reality of hallucinations is parasitic on the nature of veridical perceptions, but as we saw, given Fish's understanding of hallucinations it is not clear what entitles Fish to this claim. By contrast, the position advocated in this paper saves Fish's insight, and provides the theoretical background to substantiate it. The reason hallucinations have a felt reality is precisely that a hallucinating subject takes herself to be *perceiving*. That is, what Fish and Robinson call the "felt reality" of perception is in fact the subject's self-awareness of enjoying a perceptual experience. In a perceptual experience a subject is not merely confronted with real items in her environment; she is also *self-aware* of being confronted with these items. This is why perceptual experience "feels real."<sup>26</sup> By contrast, on the topic of hallucinations the present view undergirds two important aspects of Fish's view: the claim that "felt reality" is primary to veridical perceptions and derivative in hallucinations, and the claim that hallucinations enjoy "felt reality" due to the subject thinking that she is perceiving. Both elements are explained by the fact that hallucinations are failed exercises of the self-aware capacity of perception: states that appear to present real objects, and that appear to include self-awareness of perceiving such items. Accordingly, the capacity view of perception developed here provides a systematic explanation of Fish's observations.

## 8 Conclusion

Negative disjunctivism is a little-understood view. *Prima facie*, it simply seems highly unintuitive to claim that hallucinations lack phenomenal character and indeed that no positive independent characterization can be provided of hallucinations. However, as I have argued, these claims are not nearly as odd as they originally may seem, and indeed they fit perfectly within a systematic account of the relation between perception and hallucination. Understood as successful and failed exercises of the same capacity, there is nothing extraordinary about the thought that the nature of such exercises is determined by the good case, in which the capacity is exercised successfully rather than deficiently.<sup>27</sup>

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26 Although understood in terms of self-awareness, this is arguably not properly described as a "feeling." The topic lies beyond the concerns of this paper.

27 I am grateful to an anonymous reviewer for helpful comments on previous versions of this paper.

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AQ1—Martin (2004) is listed in the reference list but not cited in the text. Please cite in the text.