Consciousness and composition

Abstract: Most material object ontologists endorse "ANCHOR", the thesis that we would undergo the same experiences we actually undergo around simples arranged X-wise whether or not such simples composed Xs. And ANCHOR creates problems for *perceptualists*, those who believe that perception justifies belief in the existence of ordinary objects. Extant perceptualists have failed to identify resources with which they might reject ANCHOR. But in this paper, I defend a new variety of perceptualism with the resources to reject ANCHOR. I call this view "ontological empiricism". In brief, empiricists maintain that a *lawlike* connection obtains between our experiences as of objects and the compositional facts. I argue that perceptualists should endorse empiricism (§1), and that empiricists can reject ANCHOR as well as several related objections to perceptualism (§2).

Word count: 9960

Keywords: material objects, composition, experience, phenomenal character, perceptual justification, laws of nature

Introduction

Trenton Merricks once wrote:

> [T]ry to imagine a world like ours except that, while there are atoms arranged statuewise in that world, there are no statues… Such a world would seem to us just like the actual world. No amount of looking around could distinguish that imagined world from ours (2001, 55).

The thought stuck. To wit:

> Can you point to something in the perceptual scene which indicates, not just that the bricks are arranged house-wise on the corner, but that, in addition, composition has taken place in this case? [We think the answer ought to be] 'no,' or 'I'm not so sure' (Rosen & Dorr, 2002, 158).

> [T]he closest world, in which the tablewise arranged things in front of me do not compose a table, is a world in which these things are still around and arranged tablewise… I would, in this scenario, still believe, on the basis of perception, that there is a table in front of me (Sattig, 2017, 485).

> [T]he phenomenology of our perceptual episodes would be the same whether or not [atoms arranged objectwise composed an object] (Brenner, 2023, 71).

These quotations all point towards following thesis:

- **ANCHOR**: If X is a moderate-sized composite object kind, then we would undergo the same experiences (with the same phenomenal character) that we actually undergo around

simples arranged X-wise whether or not simples arranged X-wise composed Xs. ANCHOR is popular. Alex Byrne (2019) is the lone voice of dissent, and Andrew Brenner (2023)'s recent case in ANCHOR's favor targets Byrne in particular.

ANCHOR creates problems for *perceptualists*, those who maintain that perception justifies belief in the existence of ordinary objects (cf. Korman, 2015; Hofweber, 2016; 2019; Byrne, 2019; Welchance, 2026). For one thing, ANCHOR threatens to defeat our perception-based object beliefs. Sattig (2017) argues that if ANCHOR is true, then our perception-based object beliefs are not sensitive to the object facts. Merricks (2017) argues that if ANCHOR is true, then perceptual reasons are bad reasons to countenance ordinary things. Moreover, ANCHOR's truth suggests that there is no explanatory connection — causation, lawhood, grounding, etc. — between perceptual experience and the compositional facts. This motivates debunking concerns vis-à-vis our perception-based object beliefs.[1]

Several perceptualists contend that ANCHOR, even if true, fails as a defeater (cf. Korman, 2015, 202; Hofweber, 2016, 191-6). But suppose that ANCHOR fails as a defeater. Still ANCHOR renders it plausible that competing views within material object ontology are empirically equivalent to one another. Consider *ontological eliminativism*, the view that (most) objectwise arrangements of simples fail to compose objects.[2] Endorsing ANCHOR allows eliminativists to avoid a potential conflict between eliminativism and perceptual experience. And if composition has no impact on perceptual experience, then we must settle whether composite objects exist via extra-empirical resources.[3] What, then, would be the point of defending perceptualism?

---

[1] Cf. Korman (2014; 2015, ch. 7; 2019), Fairchild & Hawthorne (2018, §3), Hofweber (2019), Bagwell (2021), Egeland (2022), Gładziejewski (2023), and Kovacs (2026) for more on the debunking argument.

[2] Cf. Van Inwagen (1990), O'Leary-Hawthorne & Cortens (1995), Merricks (2001), Horgan & Potrč (2008), Sider (2013), Contessa (2014), Goldwater (2015), Builes (2022), and Westerhoff (2024) for defenses of eliminativism. I say 'most' because some eliminativists allow that simples arranged personwise compose persons.

[3] Cf. LeBrun (2021) and Brenner (2023, 69). Brenner cites several examples of such resources: theoretical virtues like unity and simplicity (cf. Horgan & Potrč, 2008; Sider, 2013; Brenner, 2017), considerations of overdetermination (cf.

ANCHOR constitutes one of perceptualism's most significant dialectical hurdles. Extant varieties of perceptualism have failed to adequately clear this hurdle. But I think a different variety of perceptualism does indeed possess the resources to reject ANCHOR. I call this view "ontological empiricism" (hereafter just "empiricism"). Empiricists maintain that a *lawful* connection obtains between our experiences and the compositional facts. This paper constitutes a manifesto for the empiricist's cause.

Endorsing empiricism requires perceptualists to shoulder commitments beyond perceptualism proper. But I shall argue that these extra commitments harmonize well with perceptualism. Moreover, empiricism's benefits are immense. For one thing, empiricists have the resources to reject ANCHOR, one of perceptualism's most significant dialectical hurdles. And the resources empiricists mobilize against ANCHOR also serve to defuse related worries. So empiricism provides perceptualists with a unified response to the most popular objections against their view.

§1: Defending empiricism

Consider the following claim:

- **COMPOSE**: If X is a moderate-sized composite object kind and perceptual conditions are normal, then we undergo composite-experiences around simples arranged X-wise that compose Xs, and we fail to undergo composite-experiences around simples arranged X-wise that fail to compose Xs.

Empiricism is the thesis that COMPOSE is a law of nature in the actual world (an "@-law"). In this section, I argue that perceptualists have reason to endorse empiricism.

§1.1: Composite-experiences

Imagine looking in the direction of simples arranged tomatowise. In response to this environmental

Merricks, 2001), and ontic vagueness (cf. Horgan & Potrč, 2008). One could add linguistic considerations (cf. Hirsch, 2011; Thomasson, 2015) and parity considerations (cf. Fairchild & Hawthorne, 2018) to the list.

stimulus, our perceptual apparatus generates an arrangement-induced *visual object* in our visual field.[4] Brian Scholl characterizes visual objects as "…visual feature clusters [which] are treated [by our visual system] as objects of attention" (2001, 30). These "visual feature clusters" are clusters of *perceptual attributives*, aspects of an experience's representational contents which attribute properties to individuals.[5] Thus around simples arranged tomatowise, our perceptual apparatus generates an arrangement-induced visual representation one aspect of which includes (say) redness and roundness attributives, attributives which are treated by our perceptual apparatus as properties of a single individual.

Call experiences wherein our perceptual apparatus generates a cluster of attributives treated as properties of a single object "particularity-experiences".[6] We undergo particularity-experiences around a great many arrangements of simples. To illustrate, consider the sort of experience ("E_{flock}") we undergo around simples arranged flock-of-birds-wise. When viewed from afar, our perceptual apparatus sometimes generates a single, flock-induced visual object made up of such-and-such shape, color, and size-attributives in response to simples arranged flock-wise. So it is plausible that E_{flock} exhibits phenomenal particularity, at least temporarily.

Particularity-experiences differ from composite-experiences. For composite-experiences are experiences wherein our perceptual apparatus delivers a cluster of attributives treated as properties of a single object *regardless of perspectival changes*. Consider, for instance, the sort of

---

[4] See Palmer (1999, ch. 7), Scholl (2001), Pylyshyn (2007, 173), Carey (2009, 69-87), Dickie (2010), and Murez & Recanati (2016) for more on visual objects.

[5] Some, such as Martin (2002) and Campbell (2002), may wish not to commit themselves to the claim that perceptual experience has representational contents. There are alternative characterizations of visual objects available to them; cf. Pylyshyn (2007, 173).

[6] The name "particularity-experience" comes from the notion of *phenomenal particularity*. An experience exhibits phenomenal particularity when, as Susanna Schellenberg puts it, "…it seems to [you] as if there is a particular object present" (Schellenberg, 2010, 22). Cf. Montague (2011), Gomes & French (2016), Schellenberg (2016), and Ali (2024) for more on phenomenal particularity. Byrne (2019)'s case against ANCHOR appeals to phenomenal particularity; Brenner (2023, §II) criticizes Byrne's approach.

experience ("E_{tomato}") we undergo around simples arranged tomatowise. E_{tomato} is a particularity-experience. And in E_{tomato}, we are typically perceptually aware of our location as well as the (purported) tomato's location relative to our own. Our perceptual apparatus nevertheless continues to deliver a cluster of attributives treated as properties of a single object as we move about our environment; as we place the tomatowise arrangement of simples under different lighting conditions; as we view the arrangement from different angles; and so on.[7] Indeed, such attributives reliably correspond to the properties we take tomatoes to possess.[8] So E_{tomato} is also composite-experience. But E_{flock} is not a composite-experience. For once we approach the relevant flockwise arrangement of simples — a perspectival change — our perceptual apparatus ceases to generate a single visual object and instead generates multiple visual objects corresponding to the birds themselves.

The composite-experiences we undergo around simples arranged tomatowise feature attributives which correspond to the properties we take tomatoes to possess. I will refer to these sorts of composite-experiences as "tomato-experiences". And, generalizing, I will refer to those composite-experiences that feature attributives which correspond to the properties we take Xs to possess as "X-experiences".

Empiricists adopt a variety of perceptualism according to which we are justifiably permitted to form composite-involving beliefs, such as <That [pointing in the direction of simples arranged tomatowise] is a red, round, bulgy object>, based on the attributives our perceptual apparatus clusters together as properties of a single object in our composite-experiences. If we

[7] For more on the "self-locating" nature of perception, see Brewer (1992), Peacocke (1992), Schellenberg (2007), Briscoe (2009), Ávila (2014), Schwenkler (2014), Alsmith (2017), and Velasco (2024).

[8] Perceptual psychologists and philosophers of perception refer to this phenomenon as *perceptual constancy*. Cf. Cohen (2014), Schulte (2021), and Burge (2009; 2022) for more on the philosophical ramifications of constancy. Burge (2009) claims that constancies mark the divide between perception and information registration. I remain neutral on this issue.

grasp the concept [TOMATO], we can infer that the referent of such beliefs is a tomato. This, I claim, is the sense in which perception justifies belief in composite objects.

Empiricists maintain that we are justifiably permitted to form beliefs like <There's a red, round, bulgy object immediately before me> based on the composite-experiences we undergo around simples arranged tomatowise. I do not adopt any particular explanation as to why our composite-experiences justify such beliefs. I do, however, assume that *reliability in normal conditions* figures into the correct explanation as to why our composite-experiences justify such beliefs.[9] That is, I assume that the reliability of our composite-experiences in normal perceptual conditions vis-à-vis composites partially explains why our composite-experiences justify belief in composites.[10]

Appealing to reliability in normal conditions helps perceptualists explain other phenomena in the epistemology of perception. For, first, it is plausible that our experiences as of cleared desks justify beliefs like <There's no tomato before me>. And second, it is plausible that our experiences as of flocks *fail* to justify beliefs like <There's a brown, undulating object before me>. I will now illustrate how perceptualists might account for such phenomena.

In normal perceptual conditions, we reliably undergo tomato-experiences around tomatoes. And that we reliably undergo tomato-experiences around tomatoes gives us reason to believe that we *would* undergo a tomato-experience *were* a tomato immediately before us. Indeed, the more

[9] Thus I deny *phenomenal conservatism*, which entails that its merely seeming to me as if a composite object is immediately before me justifies my believing that a composite object is immediately before. Cf. Pryor (2000) and Huemer (2001) for defenses of conservatism. For proponents of the "reliability in normal conditions" approach to perceptual justification, see Graham (2012; 2024), Dickie (2015), and Burge (2020).

[10] It is, of course, difficult to identify what precisely counts as a "normal" perceptual condition, but nothing here hangs on any particular parsing. For my part, I accept Tyler Burge's parsing as those conditions "…by reference to which the perceptual content of the perceptual statement is explained and established" (Burge, 2003, 532; cf. also Burge, 2020). Peter Graham (2012) endorses the related view that normal perceptual conditions are those (and similar conditions) wherein our perceptual apparatus acquired its function of reliably producing accurate representations. Cf. Butzer (2025) for criticisms to these sorts of approaches.

tomato-experiences we undergo around tomatoes, the more confident we should be we would undergo a tomato-experience were a tomato before us. And if we *would* undergo a tomato-experience *were* a tomato before us, then our failing to undergo a tomato-experience gives us reason to believe that no tomato is before us. Thus our experiences as of cleared desks justify beliefs like <There's no tomato before me>.

Now recall E_{flock}, the experience we undergo around simples arranged flockwise. E_{flock} is not a flock(-*qua*-composite)-experience, although it is sometimes a particularity-experience. Suppose we form a belief like <There's a brown, undulating object immediately before me> based on E_{flock}. I grant that such beliefs are defeasibly justified, for I take it we have defeasible reason to trust that our particularity-experiences qualify as composite-experiences. Once we discover that E_{flock} is not a flock-experience, however, we discover that we fail to reliably undergo flock-experiences around flocks (*qua* composites). And that we fail to reliably undergo flock-experiences around flocks renders it unclear whether we *would* undergo a flock-experience *were* a flock immediately before us. Maybe the flock still exists beyond perceptual detection; maybe it never existed; or maybe it existed for as long as E_{flock} was a particularity-experience, but no longer. Who knows. Since we cannot reasonably select between these options, we lose whatever justification E_{flock} previously provided for beliefs like <There's a brown, undulating object before me>.

§1.2: COMPOSE is true

Recall:

- **COMPOSE**: If X is a moderate-sized composite object kind and perceptual conditions are normal, then we undergo composite-experiences around simples arranged X-wise that compose Xs, and we fail to undergo composite-experiences around simples arranged X-wise that fail to compose Xs.

Perceptualists countenance ordinary objects on perception's basis. So perceptualists agree that we undergo composite-experiences around simples arranged objectwise that compose ordinary

objects.

COMPOSE also says that we fail to undergo composite-experiences around simples arranged X-wise that fail to compose Xs, where X is a moderate-sized composite object kind. And *trogs*, mereological sums of tree trunks and dogs, are moderate-sized composite objects (should they exist). We fail to undergo composite-experiences around simples arranged trogwise; when we look in the direction of simples arranged trogwise, our perceptual apparatus generates two visual objects onto which we can direct our attentional focus. That is, perception fails to deliver a single visual object to which we can attend, and as such fails to deliver "partly furry and party woodish" attributives on whose basis we could come to justifiably believe in trogs. So COMPOSE is true only if *ontological conservatism*— the thesis that there exist ordinary but not extraordinary objects — is true.[11]

Perceptualists do not endorse conservatism as a block. Some perceptualists endorse conservatism (cf. Korman, 2015); others are neutral (cf. Hofweber, 2016); and still others endorse *ontological permissivism*, the view that both ordinary and extraordinary objects exist.[12] (cf. Byrne & Manzotti, 2022). Endorsing empiricism, then, forces some perceptualists to shoulder commitments they may not wish to shoulder.

I will not attempt to argue that every extant perceptualist must endorse conservatism. Some who reject conservatism may have independent reasons for doing so. By virtue of its bolstering COMPOSE, however, conservatism plays a crucial role in the empiricist's case against ANCHOR (§2.1). And the fact that conservatism plays a role in clearing one of perceptualism's most

[11] Cf. Markosian (1998), Hirsch (2011), Korman (2015), Carmichael (2015), and Welchance (2026) for defenses of conservatism.

[12] Cf. Byrne & Manzotti (2022, §4) in particular. Cf. Cartwright (1987), Yablo (1987), Sosa (1999), Fine (1999), Sider (2001), Hawthorne (2006), Leslie (2011), Inman (2014), Thomasson (2015), Jago (2016), Fairchild & Hawthorne (2018), Fairchild (2019; 2021), and Dorr et al. (2021, ch. 11) for defenses of permissivism.

significant dialectical hurdles gives perceptualists who reject conservatism reason to reconsider their rejection.

Moreover, some argue that endorsing perceptualism gives one reason to endorse conservatism. For instance, Evan Welchance (2026) argues that if our perceptual apparatus is well-poised to detect ordinary objects, then our perceptual apparatus is similarly well-poised to detect extraordinary objects. The fact that we fail to "see trogs", then, gives us perceptual reason to repudiate trogs.

We can situate this claim within the framework I have recommend on the perceptualist's behalf (§1.1). Recall that we sometimes undergo experiences on whose basis we are justifiably permitted to form beliefs like <There's no tomato before me>. Suppose, for instance, we are watching a lone egret nabbing at fish along the Kamo river. The experience ("E_{gret}") we undergo as we watch this great egret on its hunt is not a tomato-experience, and we are permitted to believe <There's no tomato before me> based on E_{gret}. I call these experiences "falsifying" with respect to tomatoes.

Why is E_{gret} falsifying with respect to tomatoes? This partially owes to the fact that we *would* undergo a tomato-experience *were* a tomato before us, given no epistemic funny business. More generally, I take it that we would expect to undergo composite-experiences around simples arranged ordinary-object-wise were an ordinary object before us. Since E_{gret} is not a tomato-experience, then, we are permitted to believe things like <There's no tomato before me> on E_{gret}'s basis. Thus an experience counts as falsifying with respect to tomatoes provided that (i) it is not a tomato-experience, but (ii) we would undergo a tomato-experience were a tomato before us.

If our experiences around simples arranged trogwise ("E_{trog}") are falsifying with respect to trogs, then perception justifies disbelief in trogs. And (i) E_{trog} is not a a trog-experience. To be sure,

E_{trog} might occasionally qualify as a particularity-experience, as when chocolate labs lie atop beige tree trunks. But our perceptual apparatus generally ceases to generate a single visual object and instead generates two visual objects once we are within an appropriate viewing distance of the dog atop of the tree trunk (a perspectival change); that is, E_{trog} ceases to qualify as a particularity-experience. Composite-experiences, however, retain their particularity-character across perspectival changes. So E_{trog} is not a composite-experience.

More controversial is whether (ii) we would undergo a trog-experience were a trog before us. But the perceptualist's contention that we would undergo a composite-experience were an ordinary object before us renders (ii) plausible. Trogs, for instance, are roughly as big as many of the other objects our perceptual apparatus is well-poised to detect (trees, buildings, etc.). They gain and/or lose parts when the tree trunks and dogs that compose them gain and/or lose parts. And it would be strange to say that trogs, if they exist, are *invisible*. Since our perceptual apparatus is well-poised to detect other mid-sized dry goods that behave in similar ways, it is plausible that our perceptual apparatus is also well-poised to detect trogs. Therefore E_{trog} is falsifying with respect to trogs.

E_{trog} might continue to exhibit its particularity-character across perspectival changes, and thus count as a composite-experience, in abnormal perceptual conditions, as when dogs and tree trunks share exactly the same determinate color. COMPOSE allows that our composite-experiences may fail to track the compositional facts in abnormal perceptual conditions. And indeed, any plausible account of normal perceptual conditions must allow that our composite-experiences may fail to track the compositional facts in strange situations. So the possibility of such situations does not pose a problem for COMPOSE.

I have shown that we can situate the claim that perception justifies disbelief in

extraordinary things within the empiricist's preferred variety of perceptualism. I have not defended this claim wholesale.[13] Here I aim to show only that one's antecedent commitment to perceptualism plausibly gives one reason to endorse conservatism, and that my kind of perceptualist can make sense of such a claim. Perceptualists who wish to reject ANCHOR may prefer to endorse conservatism for different reasons (cf. Korman, 2015, ch. 4); that is fine by me. At any rate, conservatism is a relatively light commitment for perceptualists to shoulder in service of rejecting ANCHOR.

I just argued that COMPOSE is true only if conservatism is true. I have not argued that conservatism's truth suffices for COMPOSE's truth. And this is surely not the case; our perceptual apparatus might have been differently constituted. Rather, perceptualists who endorse conservatism should accept COMPOSE because COMPOSE is a simple and explanatorily powerful description of the relationship between our composite-experiences and arrangements of simples. Any perceptualist who endorses conservatism should agree.

§1.3: COMPOSE is an @-law

I have argued that perceptualists have reason to believe that COMPOSE is true. To complete my defense of empiricism, I must defend the claim that COMPOSE is an @-law.

I mentioned (§1.2) that I endorse COMPOSE because I think COMPOSE is a simple and explanatorily powerful description of the relationship between our composite-experiences and arrangements of simples. This consideration also speaks in favor of COMPOSE's being an @-law. Consider David Lewis (1973; 1983)'s best-system account of lawhood ("BSA"); according to the BSA, to be a law is to be a statement in whatever system (set of true sentences) strikes the best balance between strength and simplicity, where strength concerns a system's ability to say many

[13] Cf. Welchance (2026) for objections, and perceptualist-friendly responses, to this claim.

true things about reality, and simplicity concerns a system's being relatively easy to axiomatize. COMPOSE relates our composite-experiences — one of our most common experience types — to facts about arrangements of simples. It is relatively easy to state. Moreover, it is explanatorily powerful. For COMPOSE allows us to describe a widespread pattern concerning the sorts of experiences we undergo around arrangements of simples; namely, our composite-experiences seem to track the compositional facts. So COMPOSE plausibly belongs in the best system.

I motivated the claim that COMPOSE is an @-law by arguing that the BSA would count COMPOSE as an @-law. I do not mean to endorse the BSA wholesale. There are several alternative accounts of lawhood that empiricists may prefer to endorse.[14] I mean to say only that COMPOSE's plausibly featuring with the "best system" gives empiricists *reason to believe* that COMPOSE is an @-law.

Some will object to my claim that COMPOSE is an @-law in the following way:

> Our best theories of fundamental physics would not posit COMPOSE as a law of nature — for two reasons. First, COMPOSE mentions the non-fundamental, mereological notion of composition, but our best theories of fundamental physics can get by without mentioning mereological notions.[15] And second, COMPOSE applies only in "normal" perceptual conditions. This makes COMPOSE a *ceteris paribus* law; the laws of physics, however, are not ceteris paribus laws.[16] The laws of nature come from our best theories of fundamental physics. So COMPOSE cannot be a law of nature.

Were this line of reasoning sound, it would undermine my motivation for the claim that COMPOSE is an @-law. In what follows, I will explain why perceptualists should repudiate this line of reasoning.

I agree that our best theories of fundamental physics would not posit COMPOSE as a law. For COMPOSE describes the relationship between arrangements of simples and the experiences

---

[14] For instance, one might prefer to say that laws are relations of necessitation between universals (cf. Armstrong, 1983; Dretske, 1977; Tooley, 1987), or that laws follow from the causal powers of objects (cf. Bird, 2005).
[15] Cf. Sider (2013), although see §11 where Sider considers opposition to this claim.
[16] See, for instance, Earman & Roberts (1999).

we undergo around such arrangements. To adequately describe this relationship, we must appeal to the sorts of theoretical resources deployed by perceptual psychologists and vision scientists; otherwise we shall operate with a deficient understanding of experience. Perceptual psychologists and vision scientists routinely employ theoretical resources outside the fundamental physicist's appropriate ken. Vision scientists, for instance, mention retinal cells when attempting to explain the formation of our experiences in response to environmental stimuli.[17] Our best theories of fundamental physics do not — nor would it ever be appropriate for them to — mention retinal cells. So whatever "laws" vision scientists posit will not issue from our best theories of fundamental physics.

Our best theories of fundamental physics would not posit COMPOSE as a law. But perceptualists should deny that the laws of nature come from our best theories of fundamental physics alone. There is significant precedent for their so denying. Many philosophers have argued that a law L's featuring a *ceteris paribus* clause poses no problem to L's counting as a law of nature.[18] But suppose this is not the case. Still we might adopt a more permissive conception of lawhood that counts both exceptionless and "robust but not exceptionless" regularities as laws. As Verónica Gómez Sánchez writes:

> This permissive notion [of lawhood] is… the notion of lawhood that is relevant to the 'special sciences': sciences that predict and explain phenomena in non-fundamental terms. Laws, in [this] sense… are simply those generalizations that capture real patterns in nature, and play a special role in our understanding of the world — we rely on them for prediction, explanation and hypothetical/counterfactual reasoning (106, 2022).

Indeed, this permissive conception of lawhood is the appropriate conception of lawhood for our purposes. For, again, we are interested in the relationship between arrangements of simples and the experiences we undergo around such arrangements. And describing this relationship involves

[17] If you are worried about this claim (really?), see Geisler & Chou (1995).
[18] See, for instance, Cartwright (1983), Lange (1993; 2002), and Mumford (2018).

appealing to the sorts of non-fundamental theoretical resources deployed by perceptual psychologists and vision scientists. That COMPOSE employs (i) non-fundamental mereological notions and (ii) a *ceteris paribus*(-esque) clause, then, in no way precludes COMPOSE from counting as a law.[19]

Suppose one thinks it possible to account for our composite-experiences and normal perceptual conditions in purely fundamental terms. Further suppose that there is a non-trivial, conservative-friendly answer to the *Special Composition Question* ("SCQ"): "under what circumstances does an arrangement of simples compose a further object?"[20] Now consider the following claim:

- **COMPOSE***: If X is a moderate-sized composite object kind and perceptual conditions are normal, then we undergo composite-experiences around simples arranged X-wise that satisfy the SCQ-conditions, and we fail to undergo composite-experiences around simples arranged X-wise that fail to satisfy the SCQ-conditions.

COMPOSE* and COMPOSE are competitor-laws. And one might think that COMPOSE* is a better candidate for an @-law than COMPOSE on the grounds that COMPOSE* accounts for the relationship between arrangements of simples and experience in "more fundamental" terms than COMPOSE. For COMPOSE* mentions no mereological notions whatsoever.

Perceptualists who endorse conservatism maintain that our composite-experiences reliably track the presence and/or absence of moderate-sized composite objects in our immediate vicinity. And as several ontologists have noted, whatever answer conservatives provide to the SQC will exhibit greater complexity than competing answers (cf. Van Inwagen, 1990; Carmichael, 2015). So COMPOSE* will turn out to be far more complicated than COMPOSE. That COMPOSE* will

[19] In another germane turn, Gómez Sánchez goes on to argue that a BSA-style account of permissive laws can allow that composite objects like retinal cells feature in the laws; cf. Gómez Sánchez (2022, §4).
[20] See Van Inwagen (1990) and Merricks (2001) for eliminativist-friendly answers to the SCQ, Markosian (1998) and Carmichael (2015) for ordinary-ontologist-friendly answers, and Sider (2001) and Fairchild (2019) for permissivist-friendly answers. For more on this issue, see Merricks (2005) and Barnes (2007).

turn out to be far more complicated than COMPOSE suggests that COMPOSE* will not feature in the best system. So perceptualists have no reason to believe that COMPOSE*, rather than COMPOSE, is an @-law.

What is more, COMPOSE* emerges as a law-contender only if we assume that we can account for our composite-experiences in purely fundamental terms. This assumption lacks plausibility. Perceptual scientists typically individuate our experiences via the representational contents of our experiences. They do so because the attribution of representational contents to our experiences plausibly proves indispensable to many scientific explanations of perceptual phenomena (cf. Shea, 2018; Burge, 2010; 2022). And the representational contents of our experiences, whatever their proper characterization turns out to be, will almost certainly feature non-fundamental notions like shape, brightness, weight, and so forth. So COMPOSE* is not a serious law-contender in the first place.

§2: Cashing in

I have defended the claim that perceptualists have good reason to endorse empiricism. Now recall:

- **ANCHOR**: If X is a moderate-sized composite object kind, then we would undergo the same experiences (with the same phenomenal character) that we actually undergo around simples arranged X-wise whether or not simples arranged X-wise composed Xs.

ANCHOR constitutes one of perceptualism's must significant dialectical hurdles. Empiricists, however, have the resources to reject ANCHOR (§2.1) — and to relieve other of the perceptualist's pressure-points (§2.2-3).

§2.1: ANCHOR

Andrew Brenner (2023) defends ANCHOR. Brenner first asks us to imagine looking at a tomato just as God decrees that the simples composing that tomato no longer compose anything. He then writes:

> If I am looking at the tomato when God makes the decree, will my visual experience change when the simples cease to compose the tomato?... When the simples arranged tomato-wise cease to compose a tomato, they will continue to obstruct and reflect light in exactly the manner in which they obstructed and reflected light while they did compose a tomato… To suppose otherwise would require gratuitous modifications to one or more of the physical processes involved in my perceiving a tomato, modifications that render the laws governing those processes needlessly complex (2023, 76-7).

Brenner thus charges ANCHOR's refuseniks with "…a commitment to gratuitously complex laws governing, say, the behaviour of light, or the behaviour of our photoreceptor cells" (ibid., 77). And we should avoid committing ourselves to complex laws when simple laws will do the job; in general, complicated theories are less likely to be true than simple ones.[21]

We can frame Brenner's argument another way. Suppose that simples arranged tomatowise compose tomatoes in the actual world ("@"). Now consider two worlds where simples arranged tomatowise cease to compose tomatoes: in W_1, our experiences remain the same, and in W_2, our experiences change. Brenner asks: between W_1 and W_2, which is closer to @? Brenner claims that W_1 is closer on the grounds that we must alter the natural laws in W_2: to account for the different experiences we undergo in W_2, it seems we must introduce greater complexity into the W_2-laws governing the relationship between simple-arrangements and experience. By contrast, we need not introduce any further complexity into the W_1-laws — presumably, the W_1-laws are just the @-laws. Brenner concludes that if simples arranged tomatowise failed to compose tomatoes, then we would undergo the same experiences we actually undergo.

To resist Brenner's case for ANCHOR, perceptualists must argue that W_2 is closer to @ than W_1. On widely accepted Lewisian metrics concerning the closeness of worlds, however, lawlike similarity matters most when assessing the relative closeness of worlds (cf. Lewis, 1979). And Brenner argues that @ and W_1 have the same laws. Thus it will do perceptualists little good

[21] Paul (2012), Brenner (2017), Bradley (2018), and Chen (2025) defend law-like simplicity as a criterion in theory choice.

to claim that @ is similar to W_2 in other, non-nomic ways. To trump the lawlike similarity between @ and W_1, perceptualists would need to enumerate quite the list of non-nomic similarities between @ and W_2.

Perceptualists must reject Brenner's claim that @ and W_1 have the same laws. And this is where the empiricist's resources prove useful. Recall:

- **COMPOSE**: If X is a moderate-sized composite object kind and perceptual conditions are normal, then we undergo composite-experiences around simples arranged X-wise that compose Xs, and we fail to undergo composite-experiences around simples arranged X-wise that fail to compose Xs.

Empiricism is the thesis that COMPOSE is an @-law. And I will now argue that if COMPOSE is an @-law, then Brenner's case for ANCHOR fails.

Suppose that simples arranged tomatowise compose tomatoes, and that simples arranged trogwise fail to compose trogs. Now consider two worlds where simples arranged tomatowise fail to compose tomatoes and simples arranged trogwise compose trogs. In W_1, our experiences remain the same. In W_2, our experiences change; we fail to undergo composite-experiences around simples arranged tomatowise, whereas we undergo composite-experiences around simples arranged trogwise.

If empiricism is true, then W_2 is closer to @ than W_1. For if empiricism is true, then we would expect to fail to undergo composite-experiences around simples arranged X-wise that fail to compose Xs, and to undergo composite-experiences around simples arranged X-wise that compose Xs. This is exactly what occurs in W_2. Where we once underwent composite-experiences around simples arranged tomatowise in @, we no longer undergo such experiences now that simples arranged tomatowise fail to compose tomatoes in W_2. And where we once failed to undergo composite-experiences around simples arranged trogwise in @, we now undergo such experiences in W_2 where simples arranged trogwise compose trogs. So the state of affairs that

obtains in W_2 coheres with COMPOSE. And, presumably, if COMPOSE is an @-law, then so too is COMPOSE a W_2-law.

In W_1, by contrast, we undergo the same experiences we underwent in @ even though the compositional facts differ from @. But we would expect to undergo different experiences were COMPOSE a W_1-law. So COMPOSE is not a W_1-law. So COMPOSE is both an @-law and a W_2-law, but not a W_1-law. Thus W_2 is closer to @ than W_1. Therefore, if empiricism is true, then Brenner's case for ANCHOR fails.

Furthermore, consider:

- **WEIGH**: If X is a moderate-sized composite object kind and perceptual conditions are normal, then our experiences around simples arranged X-wise would be composite-experiences if simples arranged X-wise composed Xs, and our experiences around simples arranged X-wise would fail to be composite-experiences if simples arranged X-wise failed to compose Xs.

To say that W_2 is closer to @ than W_1 is just to say that our experiences around simples arranged X-wise would be composite-experiences if simples arranged X-wise composed Xs, and that our experiences around simples arranged X-wise would fail to be composite-experiences if simples arranged X-wise failed to compose Xs. Thus if COMPOSE is an @-law, then WEIGH is true. And if WEIGH is true then ANCHOR is false. Therefore, if empiricism is true, then ANCHOR is false.

ANCHOR says that our experiences around simples arranged (say) dogwise and trogwise would remain the same whether or not such simples composed dogs and trogs. Empiricists reject ANCHOR. So empiricists maintain that our experiences around simples arranged dogwise and trogwise would be different if the compositional facts were different. But one might wonder how, by the empiricist's lights, our experiences would differ from actuality were ANCHOR false.

Composite-experiences have two phenomenal properties which distinguish them from non-composite-experiences. First, the visual objects in composite-experiences phenomenally present

themselves to us as possessing certain stable properties (redness, roundness, etc.). Tomatoes 'look red' from afar, under non-standard lighting, and so on. Second, being attentionally linked with a visual object differs phenomenally from lacking an attentional link with a visual object. Imagine looking for a bottle of mustard in your fridge. On a first pass, and you fail to see the bottle. And then, there it is. Noticing the bottle and thus entering into an attentional link with the bottle-induced visual object makes a phenomenal difference (cf. Siegel, 2006).[22]

Suppose simples arranged tomatowise compose tomatoes. *Question*: How, by the empiricist's lights, would things look if simples arranged tomatowise failed to compose tomatoes? *Answer*: Tomatoes would fail to 'stand out' to us in much the same way that bottles of mustard occasionally fail to 'stand out' to us as we search for them in our fridges. This would be a maddening epistemic situation, but a comprehensible one — perceptual experience would present us with a loose array of qualities referentially disconnected from one another. And this is to say that our experiences would fail to be composite-experiences around simples arranged tomatowise.[23]

Now suppose simples arranged trogwise fail to compose trogs. *Question*: How, by the empiricist's lights, would things look if simples arranged trogwise composed trogs? *Answer*: Our perceptual apparatus would generate shape, size, and color attributives corresponding to the trog, permitting us to form beliefs like <That's partly tree-trunk-shaped and partly dog-shaped>, <That's partly leafy and partly furry>, and so on. Rather than generating two visual objects onto which we could direct our selective attention when presented with a tree trunk and a dog, our perceptual

[22] Dominic Alford-Duguid (2020, 634-5) calls this "contact" phenomenology.
[23] Compare with Fairchild & Hawthorne (2018, 58)'s discussion of *tablers*, creatures who 'see tables' but 'do not see chairs'.

apparatus would instead generate three.[24]

It is difficult to conceive how this 'partly X and partly Y' attributive would present itself to us. Still, I see no reason to believe it impossible for perception to operate in this way. We can describe how the world would present itself if we 'saw fewer or a greater number of' objects than we in fact see on analogy to how the world presents itself when we in fact see or fail to see objects.

§2.2: Overdetermination

It is plausible that ordinary objects are *mere causal overdeterminers*; that is, that we can account for anything that composite objects (if they exist) cause by appealing only to the arrangement of simples that would otherwise compose such objects.[25] And if X-wise arrangements of simples causally explain the experiences we undergo around simples arranged X-wise, then the Xs themselves are causally irrelevant to such experiences. Trenton Merricks thus claims that believing in a pair of gloves ("Pair") based on an experience as of Pair "…is a bad reason for believing in Pair because even if Pair does not exist, you still have that experience, and it is still fully causally explained" (2017, 138). He continues:

> …[A]ny reason for believing that any particular wholly causally redundant physical object exists that turns on some causal effect of that object is a bad reason… [Moreover,] all the *ordinary* reasons to believe in the existence of any particular physical object… turn on the causal effects of that object… [So,] we have no good ordinary reasons at all for believing that [ordinary objects] exist (ibid., 138).

So suppose that tomatoes are mere overdeterminers. Then my experience of a tomato is fully causally explained by simples arranged tomatowise. Thus, claims Merricks, my experience as of a tomato before me is a bad reason to believe in tomatoes — for even if there is no tomato before

[24] I am imagining that we can also 'see tree trunks and dogs' in this scenario. Alternatively, we might imagine creatures who 'see only trogs, not tree trunks and dogs' – so characterized, their perceptual apparatus would generate a single visual object corresponding to the trog, rather than three visual objects corresponding to the tree trunk, dog, and trog.
[25] Although see Baker (2003), Lowe (2003), Elder (2007), and Parsons (2013) for defenses of the claim that ordinary objects have emergent causal powers.

me, I undergo the same experience.

Empiricists reject ANCHOR. Since I endorse empiricism, then, I deny that even if there is no tomato before me, I undergo the same experience. But one might worry that this forces empiricists to deny that tomatoes are mere causal overdeterminers. For by the empiricist's lights, it looks like the presence of a tomato causes different sorts of experiences than the mere presence of simples arranged tomatowise. Thus, the thought goes, empiricists cannot maintain that we can fully casually account for anything that tomatoes purportedly cause (such as our experiences as of tomatoes) by appealing only to facts about the relevant arrangements of simples that would otherwise compose tomatoes — empiricists must maintain that tomatoes cause things over and above what their parts cause. The claim that composite objects have emergent causal powers, however, is controversial (cf. Merricks, 2001, 59-66).

Empiricists need not deny that tomatoes are mere causal overdeterminers. According to empiricists, a world where there are simples arranged tomatowise but no tomatoes is a world where the compositional facts differ from actuality. And if COMPOSE is an @-law, as empiricists maintain, then when we alter the compositional facts, we thereby alter facts about which arrangements of simples cause which experiences. So I agree that (i) simples arranged tomatowise (actually) causally explain our tomato-experiences, and that (ii) in worlds where there are simples arranged tomatowise but no tomatoes, those simples would causally explain our non-tomato-experiences. All of this is consistent with the claim that tomatoes are mere causal overdeterminers.

At this point, it is worth noting that empiricists are free to maintain (alongside orthodoxy) that composition is a necessary relation.[26] If so, then worlds where there are simples arranged tomatowise but no tomatoes are impossible worlds. It is unsurprising that whatever causal relations

[26] Contra Cameron (2007), Miller (2010), and Brenner (2022).

obtain in such impossible worlds would differ from whatever causal relations obtain in actuality.

§2.3: Debunking

Byrne (2019)'s case against ANCHOR rests on the notion of a particularity-experience. Byrne claims, for instance, that if 'seeing a tomato' amounts to nothing more than 'seeing simples arranged tomatowise', then "…particularity is not respected: if the scene is plural why does it appear "as if a particular object is present"?" (Byrne, 2019, 17). Brenner responds:

> [O]ur visual systems are inclined to 'chunk' certain pluralities of objects into cohesive wholes — e.g. we see a *flock* of birds, rather than each of the individual birds making up the flock. Our brains process our perceptual experiences in this way because this reduces the burden on our perceptual and cognitive systems… And if *that's* the reason why our visual systems 'chunk' the objects in our visual fields, then our visual systems will often 'chunk' many smaller objects into one larger macroscopic object *whether or not* those smaller objects really compose any such larger macroscopic object (Brenner, 2023, 74).

Brenner claims that we occasionally see flocks as 'single things' because seeing flocks as 'multiple things' would unduly burden our perceptual system. So Brenner concludes that our experiences can fail to track the compositional facts.

To a certain extent, I have already addressed this concern. For I have already argued that our experiences around flocks are not composite-experiences (§1.1) — such experiences are temporarily particularity-experiences, but not throughout perspectival changes. Whether empiricists should thereby claim that simples arranged flockwise fail to compose flocks depends on whether our perceptual apparatus is well-poised to detect flocks; that is, on whether we would undergo a flock-experience were a flock immediately before us (§1.1-2). Empiricists can remain neutral on this question. Perhaps our perceptual apparatus is indeed so poised, or perhaps biologists would characterize flocks in such a way that would explain why we should not expect to undergo flock-experiences around simples arranged flockwise.

One might nevertheless wonder why we ever undergo particularity-experiences around

arrangements of simples that fail to compose objects. As Imogen Dickie puts it, this owes to the fact that "[t]he visual processing algorithms that take us from [environmental] cues or features to [perceptual attributives] take it for granted that we are encountering ordinary objects behaving in ordinary ways against ordinary backgrounds" (Dickie, 2015, 119).[27]

Think of it this way. One pattern of retinal stimulation coheres with a great many environmental configurations, and our perceptual system is more likely to represent the environmental configuration before us as one containing ordinary objects behaving in ordinary ways. Our perceptual does so, in a sense, to relieve itself of the "burden" of having to rule out a great many more environmental configurations consistent with our present retinal pattern. And empiricists will explain why our perceptual system privileges representations as of environmental configurations containing ordinary objects by pointing out that the environmental configurations before us do indeed typically contain ordinary (but not extraordinary) objects.

I suspect, however, that Brenner has a more thoroughgoing objection in mind. For Brenner's claims are quite similar to those which motivate the *debunking argument against ordinary objects*. Here is how Korman (2015, 93) reconstructs the debunking argument:

(DK1) There is no explanatory connection between our object beliefs and the object facts.
(DK2) If so, then we shouldn't believe <There are tomatoes>.
(DK3) Therefore, we shouldn't believe <There are tomatoes>.

Korman motivates the debunking argument as follows. First, he observes that we form our object beliefs (like <There's a tomato before me>) based on the information our perceptual apparatus delivers in response to environmental stimuli. But, of course, evolution might have proceeded differently, and thus our perceptual apparatus might have delivered different information in response to environmental stimuli.

[27] Cf. Palmer (1999, 313) and Pylyshyn (2003, §3).

Consider trogs. If evolution had proceeded differently then we might have been *Troglodytes*, creatures who 'see trogs' (cf. Korman, 2015, 200-2). Why are we not Troglodytes? The debunker claims that "…this is entirely the result of various biological and cultural contingencies" (Korman 2015, 93) Thus, that we could have been Troglodytes indicates that "…we divide up the world into objects the way that we do for reasons having nothing at all to do with how the world actually is divided up" (ibid., 93). This renders (DK1) plausible. And (DK2) is a short step away; once we recognize that there is no explanatory connection between our object beliefs and the object facts, we should recognize that our object beliefs are only accidentally true if they are true at all.

Empiricists, of course, deny (DK1). For empiricism is the thesis that COMPOSE is an @-law, one describing the connection between our composite-experiences and the compositional facts. And law-like connections are explanatory connections. Granted, empiricists must assume that perceptualism is true to run their case against (DK1), and the debunking argument, if sound, entails that perceptualism is false. So the empiricist's case against (DK1) involves "bootstrapping" from our perception-based object beliefs to (DK1)'s falsity. This maneuver is no different from other bootstrapping responses to debunking arguments, both inside and outside of material object ontology.[28]

I claimed above that our perceptual system privileges representations as of environmental configurations containing ordinary objects because the environmental configurations before us do indeed typically contain ordinary (but not extraordinary) objects. The object debunker will reject this explanation. Their explanation of why our perceptual system privileges representations as of environmental configurations containing ordinary objects cites biological and cultural

[28] Cf. Korman (2015, ch. 7) and Hofweber (2019) for other bootstrapping responses to the object debunker. And cf. Enoch (2011)'s bootstrapping response to Street (2006)'s moral debunking argument.

contingencies alone, and not the existence of ordinary objects. So one might wonder if empiricists can reasonably reject (DK1) if they cannot diagnose where the debunker's motivation for (DK1) goes wrong. Luckily, empiricists who endorse conservatism on the grounds I outlined in §1.2 can provide such a diagnosis. The following example illustrates why.

When we gaze into completely empty meadows, we are permitted to form beliefs like <There's no Bigfoot before me>. Now consider *Squatches*, possible creatures who undergo Bigfoot-experiences when they gaze into those same empty meadows. The possibility of Squatches gives us no reason whatsoever to worry about our "no-Bigfoot" beliefs. Bigfoots are just the sorts of creatures our perceptual apparatus is well-poised to detect; they are large, furry creatures that walk on two legs. So if there is a Bigfoot right before me, I should see it. Provided we assume that our perceptual faculties are in good working order, then, biological and cultural contingencies do not best explain why humans are not Squatches — the better explanation is that there are no Bigfoots.

Empiricists say the same about the possibility of Troglodytes. The possibility of Troglodytes undermines my present justification for repudiating trogs only if various biological and cultural contingencies best explain why humans are not Troglodytes. But it is plausible that trogs are just the sorts of entities our perceptual apparatus is well-poised to detect (§1.2). So if there is a trog right before me, I should see it. Provided we assume that our perceptual faculties are in good working order, then, biological and cultural contingencies do not best explain why humans are not Troglodytes. The better explanation is that there are no trogs. Indeed, if there were trogs around, then we would expect to undergo the sorts of experiences Troglodytes undergo.

Notice that the debunker motivates (DK1) via the claim that biological and cultural contingencies best explain why we are not Troglodytes, which is just another way of saying that

biological and cultural contingencies best explain why our perceptual system privileges representations as of environmental configurations containing ordinary objects. But empiricists, I have argued, should reject the debunker's claim that biological and cultural contingencies best explain why we are not Troglodytes. Empiricists conclude that (DK1) is unmotivated.

§3: Conclusion

ANCHOR targets perceptualism. But I have argued that perceptualists have good reason to endorse empiricism (§1), and that empiricists have the resources to reject ANCHOR, as well as several other related challenges (§2).

To endorse empiricism, perceptualists must shoulder some extra commitments beyond perceptualism proper. Perceptualists might have independent reason not to shoulder such commitments. But I have shown that these commitments are not gratuitous, and thus that empiricism is a defensible variety of perceptualism. Moreover, empiricism's benefits are immense; empiricism issues in a unified reply to several of the most prominent objections to perceptualism presently on offer.

For my part, I endorse empiricism. I conclude that ANCHOR is false, and that the most common objections to perceptualism presently on offer fail.

Bibliography

Alford-Duguid, D. (2020). Thinking through illusion. *European Journal of Philosophy*, *28*(3), 617–638. https://doi.org/10.1111/ejop.12582

Ali, R. (2024). What Does Phenomenal Particularity Commit Us to? In R. French & B. Brogaard (Eds.), *The Roles of Representation in Visual Perception* (Vol. 486, pp. 275–287). Springer International Publishing. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-57353-8_15

Alsmith, A. J. T. (2017). Perspectival Structure and Agentive Self-Location. In F. De Vignemont & A. J. T. Alsmith (Eds.), *The Subject's Matter*. The MIT Press. https://doi.org/10.7551/mitpress/10462.003.0016

Armstrong, D. M. (1983). *What is a law of nature?* Cambridge University Press.

Ávila, I. (2014). Evans on Bodily Awareness and Perceptual Self-Location. *European Journal of Philosophy*, *22*(2), 269–287. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-0378.2012.00525.x

Bagwell, J. (2021). Eliminativism and Evolutionary Debunking. *Ergo an Open Access Journal of Philosophy*, *8*(0). https://doi.org/10.3998/ergo.1154

Baker, L. R. (2003). Book Reviews. *Australasian Journal of Philosophy*, *81*(4), 597–598. https://doi.org/10.1080/724050596

Barnes, E. (2007). Vagueness and Arbitrariness: Merricks on Composition. *Mind*, *116*(461), 105–113. https://doi.org/10.1093/mind/fzm105

Bird, A. (2005). The Dispositionalist Conception of Laws. *Foundations of Science*, *10*(4), 353–370. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10699-004-5259-9

Brenner, A. (2017). Simplicity as a criterion of theory choice in metaphysics. *Philosophical Studies*, *174*(11), 2687–2707. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11098-016-0805-1

Brenner, A. (2022). How to be a Mereological Anti-Realist. In L. Buchak & D. W. Zimmerman (Eds.), *Oxford Studies in Philosophy of Religion Volume 10* (1st ed., pp. 83–119). Oxford University PressOxford. https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780192862976.003.0003

Brenner, A. (2023). Sense Perception and Mereological Nihilism. *The Philosophical Quarterly*, *74*(1), 68–83. https://doi.org/10.1093/pq/pqac081

Brewer, B. (1992). Self-Location and Agency. *Mind*, *101*(401), 17–34. https://doi.org/10.1093/mind/101.401.17

Briscoe, R. (2009). Egocentric Spatial Representation in Action and Perception*. *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, *79*(2), 423–460. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1933-1592.2009.00284.x

Builes, D. (2022). Ontology and Arbitrariness. *Australasian Journal of Philosophy*, *100*(3), 485–495. https://doi.org/10.1080/00048402.2021.1931377

Burge, T. (2003). Perceptual Entitlement. *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, *67*(3), 503–548. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1933-1592.2003.tb00307.x

Burge, T. (2009). Perceptual Objectivity. *The Philosophical Review*, *118*(3), 285–324. https://doi.org/10.1215/00318108-2009-001

Burge, T. (2020). Entitlement: The Basis for Empirical Epistemic Warrant. In P. J. Graham & N. J. L. L. Pedersen (Eds.), *Epistemic Entitlement* (pp. 37–142). Oxford University Press. https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780198713524.003.0002

Burge, T. (2022). *Perception: First form of mind* (First edition). Oxford University Press.

Butzer, T. (2025). Entitlement, calamities and content: An objection to Tyler Burge's perceptual epistemology. *Inquiry*, *68*(7), 1982–1998. https://doi.org/10.1080/0020174X.2022.2128406

Byrne, A. (2019). Perception and Ordinary Objects. In J. Cumpa & B. Brewer (Eds.), *The Nature of Ordinary Objects* (1st ed., pp. 6–26). Cambridge University Press. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781316612897.002

Byrne, A., & Manzotti, R. (2022). Hallucination and Its Objects. *The Philosophical Review*, *131*(3), 327–359. https://doi.org/10.1215/00318108-9743835

Cameron, R. P. (2007). The contingency of composition. *Philosophical Studies*, *136*(1), 99–121. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11098-007-9144-6

Campbell, J. (2002). *Reference and consciousness*. Clarendon Press ; Oxford University Press.

Carey, S. (2009). *The origin of concepts*. Oxford university press.

Carmichael, C. (2015). Toward a Commonsense Answer to the Special Composition Question. *Australasian Journal of Philosophy*, *93*(3), 475–490. https://doi.org/10.1080/00048402.2014.989397

Cartwright, N. (1983). *How the laws of physics lie*. Clarendon Press ; Oxford University Press.

Cartwright, R. (1987). *Philosophical essays*. MIT Press.

Chen, E. K. (2025). The simplicity of physical laws. *Noûs*, *59*(4), 957–987. https://doi.org/10.1111/nous.12542

Cohen, J. (2014). *Perceptual Constancy*. Oxford University Press. https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199600472.013.014

Contessa, G. (2014). One's a Crowd: Mereological Nihilism without Ordinary-Object Eliminativism. *Analytic Philosophy*, *55*(2), 199–221. https://doi.org/10.1111/phib.12037

Dickie, I. (2010). We are Acquainted with Ordinary Things. In R. Jeshion (Ed.), *New Essays on Singular Thought* (1st ed., pp. 213–245). Oxford University PressOxford. https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199567881.003.0008

Dickie, I. (2015). *Fixing reference* (First edition). Oxford University Press.

Dorr, C., Hawthorne, J., & Yli-Vakkuri, J. (2021). *The bounds of possibility: Puzzles of modal variation* (First edition). Oxford University Press.

Dretske, F. I. (1977). Laws of Nature. *Philosophy of Science*, *44*(2), 248–268. https://doi.org/10.1086/288741

Earman, J., & Roberts, J. (1999). "Ceteris Paribus", There Is No Problem of Provisos. *Synthese*, *118*(3), 439–478. https://doi.org/10.1023/A:1005106917477

Egeland, J. (2022). The Epistemology of Debunking Argumentation. *The Philosophical Quarterly*, *72*(4), 837–852. https://doi.org/10.1093/pq/pqab074

Elder, C. L. (2007). On the Phenomenon of "Dog-Wise Arrangement." *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, *74*(1), 132–155. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1933-1592.2007.00006.x

Enoch, D. (2011). *Taking morality seriously: A defense of robust realism*. Oxford University Press.
Fairchild, M. (2019). The Barest Flutter of the Smallest Leaf: Understanding Material Plenitude. *The Philosophical Review*, *128*(2), 143–178. https://doi.org/10.1215/00318108-7374932
Fairchild, M. (2022). Arbitrariness and the long road to permissivism. *Noûs*, *56*(3), 619–638. https://doi.org/10.1111/nous.12376
Fairchild, M., & Hawthorne, J. (2018). Against Conservatism in Metaphysics. *Royal Institute of Philosophy Supplement*, *82*, 45–75. https://doi.org/10.1017/S1358246118000103
Fine, K. (1999). Things and Their Parts. *Midwest Studies In Philosophy*, *23*(1), 61–74. https://doi.org/10.1111/1475-4975.00004
Geisler, W. S., & Chou, K.-L. (1995). Separation of low-level and high-level factors in complex tasks: Visual search. *Psychological Review*, *102*(2), 356–378. https://doi.org/10.1037/0033-295X.102.2.356
Gładziejewski, P. (2023). Un-debunking Ordinary Objects with the Help of Predictive Processing. *The British Journal for the Philosophy of Science*, *74*(4), 1047–1068. https://doi.org/10.1086/715105
Goldwater, J. P. B. (2015). No Composition, No Problem: Ordinary Objects as Arrangements. *Philosophia*, *43*(2), 367–379. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11406-015-9593-7
Gomes, A., & French, C. (2016). On the particularity of experience. *Philosophical Studies*, *173*(2), 451–460. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11098-015-0501-6
Gómez Sánchez, V. (2023). Naturalness by law. *Noûs*, *57*(1), 100–127. https://doi.org/10.1111/nous.12433
Graham, P. J. (2012). Epistemic Entitlement. *Noûs*, *46*(3), 449–482. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-0068.2010.00815.x
Graham, P. J. (2024). The new evil demon problem at 40. *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, *109*(2), 478–504. https://doi.org/10.1111/phpr.13052
Hawthorne, J. (2006). *Metaphysical essays*. Clarendon.
Hirsch, E. (2011). *Quantifier variance and realism: Essays in metaontology*. Oxford University Press.
Hofweber, T. (2016). *Ontology and the ambitions of metaphysics* (First edition). Oxford University Press.
Hofweber, T. (2019). Empirical Evidence and the Metaphysics of Ordinary Objects. In J. Cumpa & B. Brewer (Eds.), *The Nature of Ordinary Objects* (1st ed., pp. 27–47). Cambridge University Press. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781316612897.003
Horgan, T., & Potrč, M. (2008). *Austere realism: Contextual semantics meets minimal ontology*. MIT Press.
Huemer, M. (2001). *Skepticism and the veil of perception*. Rowman & Littlefield Publishers.
Inman, R. (2014). Neo-Aristotelian Plenitude. *Philosophical Studies*, *168*(3), 583–597. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11098-013-0144-4
Jago, M. (2016). Essence and the Grounding Problem. In M. Jago (Ed.), *Reality Making* (pp. 99–120). Oxford University Press. https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780198755722.003.0006
Korman, D. Z. (2014). Debunking Perceptual Beliefs about Ordinary Objects. *Philosophers' Imprint*, *14*(13). http://hdl.handle.net/2027/spo.3521354.0014.013
Korman, D. Z. (2015). *Objects: Nothing out of the ordinary* (First edition). Oxford University Press.
Korman, D. Z. (2019). Debunking Arguments in Metaethics and Metaphysics. In A. I. Goldman & B. P. McLaughlin (Eds.), *Metaphysics and Cognitive Science* (1st ed., pp. 337–363). Oxford University PressNew York. https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780190639679.003.0014
Kovacs, D. M. (2026). The Epistemology Of Ordinary Objects: How To Deflate The Debunker. *Australasian Journal of Philosophy*, 1–18. https://doi.org/10.1080/00048402.2026.2659884
Lange, M. (1993). Natural laws and the problem of provisos. *Erkenntnis*, *38*(2), 233–248. https://doi.org/10.1007/BF01128982
Lange, M. (2002). Who's Afraid of Ceteris-Paribus Laws? Or: How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love Them. *Erkenntnis*, *57*(3), 407–423. https://doi.org/10.1023/A:1021546731582
LeBrun, A. (2021). What are empirical consequences? On dispensability and composite objects. *Synthese*, *199*(5–6), 13201–13223. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11229-021-03373-4
Leslie, S.-J. (2011). Essence, Plenitude, and Paradox. *Philosophical Perspectives*, *25*(1), 277–296. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1520-8583.2011.00216.x
Lewis, D. (1979). Counterfactual Dependence and Time's Arrow. *Noûs*, *13*(4), 455. https://doi.org/10.2307/2215339
Lewis, D. (1983). New work for a theory of universals. *Australasian Journal of Philosophy*, *61*(4), 343–377. https://doi.org/10.1080/00048408312341131
Lewis, D. K. (1973). *Counterfactuals* (Rev. ed.). Blackwell Publishers.
Lowe, E. J. (2003). In Defense of Moderate-Sized Specimens of Dry Goods. *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, *67*(3), 704–710. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1933-1592.2003.tb00319.x

Markosian, N. (1998). Brutal Composition. *Philosophical Studies*, *92*(3), 211–249. https://doi.org/10.1023/A:1004267523392

Martin, M. G. F. (2002). The Transparency of Experience. *Mind & Language*, *17*(4), 376–425. https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-0017.00205

Merricks, T. (2001). *Objects and persons*. Clarendon Press.

Merricks, T. (2005). Composition and Vagueness. *Mind*, *114*(455), 615–637. https://doi.org/10.1093/mind/fzi615

Merricks, T. (2016). Do Ordinary Objects Exist? No. In E. Barnes (Ed.), *Current Controversies in Metaphysics* (1st Edition, pp. 135–148). Routledge.

Miller, K. (2010). The Existential Quantifier, Composition and Contingency. *Erkenntnis*, *73*(2), 211–235. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10670-010-9250-2

Montague, M. (2011). The Phenomenology of Particularity. In T. Bayne & M. Montague (Eds.), *Cognitive Phenomenology* (pp. 121–140). Oxford University Press. https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199579938.003.0006

Mumford, S. (2018). *Laws and Their Exceptions* (Vol. 1). Oxford University Press. https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780198746775.003.0011

Murez, M., & Recanati, F. (2016). Mental Files: An Introduction. *Review of Philosophy and Psychology*, *7*(2), 265–281. https://doi.org/10.1007/s13164-016-0314-3

Nagel, T. (1974). What Is It Like to Be a Bat? *The Philosophical Review*, *83*(4), 435. https://doi.org/10.2307/2183914

O'Leary-Hawthorne, J., & Cortens, A. (1995). Towards ontological nihilism. *Philosophical Studies*, *79*(2), 143–165. https://doi.org/10.1007/BF00989707

Palmer, S. E. (1999). *Vision science: Photons to phenomenology*. MIT Press.

Parsons, J. (2013). Conceptual Conservatism and Contingent Composition. *Inquiry*, *56*(4), 327–339. https://doi.org/10.1080/0020174X.2013.816249

Paul, L. A. (2012). Metaphysics as modeling: The handmaiden's tale. *Philosophical Studies*, *160*(1), 1–29. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11098-012-9906-7

Peacocke, C. (1992). *A study of concepts*. MIT Press.

Pryor, J. (2000). The Skeptic and the Dogmatist. *Noûs*, *34*(4), 517–549. https://doi.org/10.1111/0029-4624.00277

Pylyshyn, Z. W. (2003). *Seeing and visualizing: It's not what you think*. MIT Press.

Pylyshyn, Z. W. (2007). *Things and places: How the mind connects with the world*. MIT Press.

Rosen, G., & Dorr, C. (2002). Composition as a Fiction. In R. M. Gale (Ed.), *The Blackwell Guide to Metaphysics* (1st ed., pp. 151–174). Wiley. https://doi.org/10.1002/9780470998984.ch8

Sattig, T. (2017). Metaphysical Ambitions in the Ontology of Objects. *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, *94*(2), 481–487. https://doi.org/10.1111/phpr.12387

Schellenberg, S. (2007). Action and Self-Location in Perception. *Mind*, *116*(463), 603–632. https://doi.org/10.1093/mind/fzm603

Schellenberg, S. (2010). The particularity and phenomenology of perceptual experience. *Philosophical Studies*, *149*(1), 19–48. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11098-010-9540-1

Schellenberg, S. (2016). Perceptual Particularity. *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, *93*(1), 25–54. https://doi.org/10.1111/phpr.12278

Scholl, B. J. (2001). Objects and attention: The state of the art. *Cognition*, *80*(1–2), 1–46. https://doi.org/10.1016/S0010-0277(00)00152-9

Schulte, P. (2021). The nature of perceptual constancies. *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, *103*(1), 3–20. https://doi.org/10.1111/phpr.12693

Schwenkler, J. (2014). Vision, Self-Location, and the Phenomenology of the 'Point of View.' *Noûs*, *48*(1), 137–155. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-0068.2012.00871.x

Sider, T. (2001). *Four-dimensionalism: An ontology of persistence and time*. Clarendon Press.

Sider, T. (2013). Against Parthood. In K. Bennett & D. W. Zimmerman (Eds.), *Oxford Studies in Metaphysics, Volume 8* (pp. 236–293). Oxford University Press. https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199682904.003.0006

Siegel, S. (2006). How does visual phenomenology constrain object-seeing? *Australasian Journal of Philosophy*, *84*(3), 429–441. https://doi.org/10.1080/00048400600895961

Sosa, E. (1999). Existential Relativity. *Midwest Studies In Philosophy*, *23*(1), 132–143. https://doi.org/10.1111/1475-4975.00007

Street, S. (2006). A Darwinian Dilemma for Realist Theories of Value. *Philosophical Studies*, *127*(1), 109–166. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11098-005-1726-6

Thomasson, A. L. (2015). *Ontology made easy*. Oxford University Press.

Tooley, M. (1987). *Causation: A realist approach*. Clarendon Press ; Oxford University Press.

Van Inwagen, P. (1990). *Material Beings*. Cornell University Press. https://doi.org/10.7591/9781501713033
Velasco, P. (2025). Self-location in perceptual experience: A top-down account. *Mind & Language*, *40*(2), 157–173. https://doi.org/10.1111/mila.12525
Welchance, E. (2026). Perception and extraordinary objects. *Synthese*, *207*(2), 58. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11229-026-05441-z
Westerhoff, J. (2024). An argument for ontological nihilism. *Inquiry*, *67*(1), 513–559. https://doi.org/10.1080/0020174X.2021.1934268
Yablo, S. (1987). Identity, Essence, and Indiscernibility. *The Journal of Philosophy*, *84*(6), 293. https://doi.org/10.2307/2026781