



Reply to Livet: Meta-abeyance?

Thomas Metzinger
Philosophisches Seminar
Johannes Gutenberg-Universität Mainz
D-55099 Mainz
www.philosophie.uni-mainz.de/metzinger
metzinger@uni-mainz.de
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Let me begin by pointing out a number of potential misunderstandings in Pierre Livet's densely written commentary. In the first paragraph, Pierre Livet writes, "phenomenal transparency involves an implication of the existence of the entities represented" (p.2). This is what I call the "extensionality equivocation" (BNO: p. 167). As explained at length in BNO, "phenomenal transparency" has been a technical term in philosophy at least since G. E. Moore's (1903) paper *The Refutation of Idealism*. In BNO, I offered a refined notion of the concept. I also discussed at length that there are at least *three* other well-defined notions of "transparency" in the literature: epistemic transparency (in philosophical epistemology), referential transparency (in formal semantics), and transparency as a property of information channels (in communication theory). I will not repeat myself here (cf. BNO: p. 166ff), but simply point out that the implication towards the existence of entities mentioned in certain sentences is a property of *extensional contexts* – and not, as Livet writes, of phenomenally transparent states. Let me quote from BNO, "transparency as a property of contexts is *not* what I am talking about here" (p. 167). I assume that Livet's first misunderstanding comes from the interesting analogy between sentences constituting extensional contexts and fully transparent phenomenal representations, which I drew attention to on the very same page.

In the next sentence, there is a crucial omission. Livet writes that opacity "makes us able to represent the distinction between appearance and reality" (p. 2). No. It allows us to *consciously experience* this distinction. As I have made clear, not every form of access or knowledge, or even of knowledge about earlier processing stages, will have the same phenomenological effect. It is only availability of earlier processing stages to introspective attention that generates the feature in question.

This last misunderstanding has direct consequences for Livet's attempt to disambiguate the concept of "phenomenal transparency," as I introduced it in BNO. But of course, his contribution can also be seen as developing a new range of interpretations altogether—not all of which have to do with the original philosophical problem. (T1) is about intentional content, and therefore not at all about *phenomenal* transparency. The same applies to (T2), "directedness": if this is about intentionality in a classical sense, it misses the point. If it is about phenomenally represented intentionality, then it is about the concept of a "PMIR" introduced later in the book. (T3) rests on the misunderstanding already explained above. It is hard to understand what precisely is meant by (T4), because, as explained, phenomenal transparency has nothing to do with "assumptions" at all and can exist in creatures incapable of abstract thought or language. (T5) misses the point, which is about *phenomenal* and not *cognitive* experience. (T6) makes an interesting point, but it remains unclear what exactly is the difference between "insensitivity" and "lack of availability for introspective attention." I will not discuss the corresponding notion of (O7) here, but simply point that, while (T7) accurately depicts what I have in mind, (O7) does not, and neither does (O1), because it is not only about cognitive processing, but also, for example, about *perceptual* or *emotional* processing.

Next, I must state a more serious difficulty, which, no doubt, is my own problem and not Pierre Livet's. I am unable to understand the concept of "abeyance" as a "side-consciousness of a conflict as let unsolved with no need to solve it" (p. 2). It must be a form of phenomenal content (consciousness) in the "fringe" of experience (i.e. not the current object component of the PMIR in the terminology developed in BNO) that is about a certain kind of conflict. I have tried hard, but I am absolutely unable to understand what Pierre Livet's related, and central, concept of "meta-abeyance" (p.3) actually means. Meta-representation or second-order content are well-defined properties, but, as indicated above, I am uncertain about the same possibility for *phenomenal* content *as such*. There may be second-order intentional content, i.e., *metarepresentational* content, but if anything like *metaphenomenal* content exists, I don't know. Can there be appearance (as such) of appearance (as such)? Be that as it may, "abeyance of abeyance" would have to be a side-consciousness of a side-consciousness, probably of a conflict as referring to another conflict, and I simply have great difficulties understanding what exactly that could mean. Unfortunately, this has consequences for my attempts to understand later parts of Livet's stimulating commentary. However, I fully agree that we must begin distinguishing different types of phenomenal opacity relative to different types of access—for instance, that it may be helpful to distinguish between "cognitive" and "attentional" opacity in developing a taxonomy capturing the differences between complex hallucinations and pseudo-hallucinations more clearly (BNO: p. 463).

Section 1 starts with a *petitio*: "We have no attentional access to the current cognitive processes that are working at the present time to bring us our present phenomenal content" (p.3). Livet then makes an important point in saying that, as we never have functional access to *present* processing stages, this also unites transparent and opaque phenomenal content. In the next paragraph, there is another slight misunderstanding: "auto-epistemical closure" is a property of systems, not of beliefs. The following paragraph again conflates intentional content, (something a belief possesses) and phenomenal content (something a belief may or may not possess). I also never claimed that "the difference between appearance and reality" is "an implication" of the

ability to have phenomenally opaque experience (p. 4f). Opacity is a necessary precondition for the discovery of this difference. I also have great doubts about Livet's analysis of hallucinations (he probably means pseudo-hallucinations) as meta-perceptual content (but as these points are discussed at great length in BNO, I will not elaborate on them here). I do not understand why directedness is a salient feature of transparency or what it means that "our consciousness" is directed towards, say, a spatial image. In the classical model, directedness is property of a mental act, and not of "our consciousness." Many of the difficulties and misunderstandings sketched so far echo through later passages of this commentary.

But let me conclude by highlighting some positive points, on some of Livet's remarks that I found helpful. I unfortunately cannot grasp the point of transparency being "only double opacity" or the "soft neglect" of meta-abeyance (p. 12). Nevertheless Livet, in criticizing my idea that opaque phenomenal content might be about earlier processing stages or vehicle properties, points out that here we are confronted with a "more elaborated stage" (p. 12) of phenomenal processing. This is in accordance with my own idea: opacity increases the computational load on the system, whereas transparency is always the simpler solution. Correspondingly, the phenomenal content involved in perceiving a tree is a simpler form of content than the one generated in the phenomenal experience of having a pseudo-hallucination of the very same tree. It is harder to sustain a lucid dream than to have an ordinary dream. The reason for this effect is simple: co-representing the *representational* character of an ongoing process of phenomenal experience necessarily creates, as Livet agrees and importantly points out, a more elaborate form of content. This is simply because some vehicle properties are now elevated to the level of content properties.