In this paper, I will defend phenomenological inclusivism. According to phenomenological inclusivism, the phenomenological character—I take this term to be at least slightly more neutral and potentially more encompassing than the more usual ‘phenomenal character’—of many of our experiences is, at least in part, constituted by non-sensory mental acts or states.  

Phenomenological exclusivism, by contrast, is the view that the phenomenological character of any mental state with a phenomenological character is in all cases reducible to the phenomenological character of the sensory and affective states that accompany or help constitute it. Or, as Jesse Prinz (2011, p. 176) characterizes “restrictivism”, it is the view that any experience E with a phenomenological character C, there is a possible state E* that has the same phenomenological character as E but has only sensory content.

My argument will proceed as follows. After a brief discussion of the distinction between empty and intuitive intentions in section 1, I discuss several methods by whose means we can discover whether something contributes to the phenomenological character of an experience. The most important of these for the present purposes is the method of phenomenal comparison. In section 3, I employ this method to support the claim that empty intentions can make a constitutive contribution to the phenomenological character of one’s experiences. When I think that my house is blue, for instance, something phenomenologically salient remains constant across experiences whose intuitive contents, whether sensory or imaginative, differ dramatically. In section 4, I argue that no combination of intuitive contents whatsoever guarantees that one is consciously thinking a given thought. Finally, in section 5, I argue that the exclusivist cannot account for the phenomenological character of perceptual experience itself, since it too is riddled with empty intentions. I conclude that exclusivism is probably false.

1 I borrow the terms “inclusivism” and “exclusivism” from Siewert (2011). According to his characterization, “phenomenality should be granted to the occurrence of conceptual activity that is found in thinking about something, even when what we are thinking about is not sensorily apparent or imagined” (ibid., pp. 237f.).

2 This is my restatement. His definition reads: “Restrictivism is true if and only if, for every vehicle with qualitative character, there could be a qualitatively identical vehicle that has only sensory content” (Prinz, 2011, p. 176). By mental “vehicles” Prinz means “mental representations” (ibid., p. 175). I will treat experiences as the relevant vehicles.
1. Intuitive and Empty Intentions

Paradigmatic conscious experiences are *intuitive* experiences, or those with *intuitive content*. Intuitive experiences include sensory experiences, perceptual experiences, imaginative experiences, imagistic memories and, less centrally, cases of image-consciousness. (I hesitate to call this sort of content ‘sensory’ because I doubt that imagination and memory involve sensations. I do not seem to *sense* pain or noise when I imagine or remember them.) What all of these experiences have in common is that their intentional objects—those qualities, entities, or states of affairs that the experiences are of or about—are in some way *present* to consciousness. In perceptual and sensory states, the relevant objects are present “in the flesh” (Husserl, 2001, p. 140). Perception is an ‘originary’ form of intuition. Imagination and memory are reproductive modifications of perception (Husserl, 1982, §78). Consciousness itself is intuitive to this extent: no matter which particular conscious state we are in, we are always in some intuitive state or other. No matter what we are conscious of, no matter how far our awareness might otherwise stray from anything intuitively present or quasi-present, we always seem also to be experiencing bodily sensations and perceiving our environments.

Some conscious states, however, also incorporate *non-intuitive* or *empty* intentions. Such experiences have *empty content*. Consider the following contrast. Suppose, in one case, that I enjoy a perceptual experience of my blue house. In another case, I am conscious of my house while perceiving something completely unrelated to it, such as the snow falling outside my office window or a shelf full of books. This could happen, for instance, if I merely think about my house. The two experiences differ massively in their phenomenological character. What it is like to perceive the house is very different from what it is like to merely think about it. In the one case, I am aware of the house *intuitively*, and, more specifically, perceptually. In the other, I am aware of it *emptily*. In the latter case, what is intuitively given and what is meant “have nothing to do with one another” (Husserl, 1970, p. 712).

The distinction between intuitive and empty intentions and their corresponding contents is not a distinction between their objects or how those objects are represented intrinsically to be.
It is not, or at least not necessarily, a distinction to be discovered on the right side of the “of”\(^3\). As Pietersma (1973, p. 96) puts it, “[w]hen an intentional experience is characterized as ‘empty’, this term designates a character of that experience”—and not a character of the object of that experience.\(^4\) Any way that an object can be perceived or otherwise intuited intrinsically to be is also a way in which it can, in principle, be emptily thought intrinsically to be (Hopp, 2011, p. 24). I can perceive my house, but I can also emptily think about my house. I can perceive something that is blue, and I can emptily represent the property of being blue. I can perceive it to be a very determinate shade of blue, and I can think of it as being precisely that shade of blue. Even many subject-relative features of an object can be represented emptily. For instance, I can merely think that a given object is \textit{perceived by me}, even when it is not. While perceptual experiences often present their objects in a richer and more fine-grained way than mere thinking does, this is by no means what distinguishes them. Some intuitive presentations present their objects quite indeterminately. A blurry perception of a shape is not a clear presentation of a blurry shape. And some empty intentions can be much more fine-grained than any experience. In mere thought, but not in perception, we can represent an object’s length in nanometers, for instance. And any intuitive content we can experience would be laughably inadequate to the content of the thought that a mole contains \(6.022 \times 10^{23}\) atoms.

Furthermore, the distinction between empty and intuitive intentions and their contents is a distinction we draw \textit{within} conscious experience itself, not a distinction between conscious and unconscious experiences or mental states. The distinction is itself phenomenologically obvious and not something that we must posit for explanatory or theoretical purposes. Each of us has been consciously aware of entities that we have never intuited, and each of us has been consciously aware of being consciously aware of them. The objects of our empty intentions include not only such exotica as physicists’ strings and magnetic fields, but, for many of us, more familiar things such as Heidelberg University, the Roman Forum, and what we’re going to eat in ten minutes. The scope of thought outpaces intuition as a matter of principle in almost every mature science, and as a matter of practical necessity in the ordinary run of human affairs. And much of that thought is fully conscious. Moreover, even acts of positing or thinking about

\(^3\) I borrow this helpful phrase from Husserl (2005, p. 218).
\(^4\) What Loar (2003, p. 241) writes about visual perception is true of empty and intuitive experiences as well: “the directedness of a visual perception is an aspect of how the perception […] presents things. It is not a matter of the perception’s presenting something as \(F\), but rather of its style or manner or mode of presentation”.
unobserved entities, such as unconscious mental processes or states, are themselves typically conscious mental states, and, as the consciousness of what is not observed or intuited, harbor empty intentions. If no states with empty intentions and contents were conscious, then we could not consciously entertain thoughts about unconscious cognitive processes and states.

With the distinction between empty and intuitive intentions and its associated terminology in place, I will understand exclusivism to be the position that for any conscious experience E with a phenomenological character C, there could be an experience E* with phenomenological character C that shares nothing but its intuitive content with E. So, for instance, if my act of thinking that my house is blue has a phenomenological character at all, there is some experience, which is phenomenologically just like it, that only shares the same intuitive content with that experience. On this view, the phenomenological character of a total experiential state is determined entirely by the intuitive experiences that help compose it. Exclusivism will be false and inclusivism will be true, then, if some experiences’ phenomenological characters constitutively depend on the empty intentions that partially make them up.

2. How to Discover What Contributes to Phenomenological Character

How, then, are we to determine whether empty intentions make a constitutive—as opposed to merely causal—contribution to an experience’s phenomenological character? In the debate over cognitive phenomenology, some philosophers appear to believe that if cognitive states make a constitutive contribution to the phenomenological character of one’s experiential state, their contribution should be something that is left over after we strip our total experiential states of everything that accompanies the cognitive states themselves. Eric Lormond (1996, pp. 246f.), for instance, observes that after we “exclude” what it is like to experience various sensory states (perceptual, bodily, imaginative), “typically there seems to be nothing left over that it is like for one to have a conscious belief that snow is white”. Tye and Wright (2011) agree.

5 “For of course”, as Carruthers and Veillet (2011, p. 38) put it, “everyone allows that what one thinks can make a causal difference to what one experiences”.

4
It is understandable why someone would think this exclude-and-isolate method is an effective way for to discover what contributes to an experience’s phenomenological character. It appears to work well with a variety of sensory states. Suppose I experience pain in my foot while seeing a red tomato, thinking of a cat, hearing a C major chord, and tasting and smelling a pineapple. Surely there would be something distinctive left over after I exclude everything but the pain, namely the pain. Similar remarks go for a wide variety of sensory properties. Jesse Prinz (2011, p. 193), noting this, challenges the inclusivist to produce a case in which we experience the alleged “phenomenal remainder” introduced by cognition “without the concomitant imagery” or, more broadly, the concomitant sensory and emotional states. “After all”, he writes, “the components of sensory consciousness can all be experienced in isolation” (ibid.). And so, when it comes to cognitive phenomenal qualities, we should also “be able to experience them in isolation” (ibid.).

Despite the at first glance promising prospects for the exclude-and-isolate method, there are reasons to think that successfully employing it is not necessary to successfully defend inclusivism (see Siewert, 2011, pp. 249f.). For one thing, it is simply false that all of the components of sensory consciousness can be experienced in isolation. Take the perceptual consciousness of a tone. In hearing a tone, we are perceptually conscious of its timbre, its pitch, and its volume, and our consciousness of each makes a contribution to the phenomenological character of hearing a tone. This, however, is not something we could discover by the exclude-and-isolate method. We could not possibly exclude our consciousness of any two, or even any one, of the tone-components and have an experience of the remaining components left over. Eliminate the experience of a tone’s pitch, timbre, or volume, and you eliminate the experience of the tone altogether.

Secondly, there may exist methods which allow us to determine that something makes a contribution to the phenomenological character of an experience without its being isolable. Returning to the previous example of the experience of a tone, we know that each component of the tone exists and that our experience of each makes a constitutive contribution to the phenomenological character of our experience. The reason is that we can see that something phenomenologically salient remains constant whenever we vary two components of a tone and leave the remaining one constant. If I change the timbre and pitch of a tone but keep its volume constant, there is something that remains constant in the phenomenological character of my
experience of it. Again, if I play a melody on a different instrument at a different volume, something remains constant in the phenomenological character of my experience. What it is like to hear ‘Happy Birthday’ on a loudly played piano resembles what it is like to hear it played softly on a guitar. But that common something in virtue of which they resemble one another cannot be isolated and experienced by itself.

Since all cognitive episodes seem to be embedded within total experiential states that have intuitive or sensory components, the way to discover whether cognitive states constitutively contribute to their phenomenological character is not via the exclude-and-isolate method. A more promising method is the method of phenomenal contrast (Siegel 2011, ch. 3; Kriegel, 2011, p. 91f.). Here we consider some hypothesis H—for instance that cognitive states contribute to the phenomenological character of those experiences in which they occur. Then we consider two experiences E1 and E2 which differ in their phenomenological character, and argue that hypothesis H best explains the difference. For example, we might take two experiences that (i) seem to share the same intuitive content but (ii) differ in both their cognitive content and their phenomenological character, and argue that this difference is best explained by the hypothesis that cognitive content contributes to phenomenal character. Several examples employing this method can be found in Siewert’s The Significance of Consciousness. Consider a case in which we hear an ambiguous sentence, first understanding it according to one sense, and then another. My host at dinner, for instance, might say, ‘I hope the food’s not too hot for you.’ In one case, I take him to be speaking of the food’s temperature. In another, I take him to be talking about its spiciness. The two experiences appear to have the same intuitive content, but differ in both their phenomenological character and their cognitive content (Siewert, 1998, p. 278).

As convincing as I find some of these examples, they do not seem to persuade exclusivists, for whom the method is typically thought to break down at the first step. Prinz, for example, remains unmoved by every alleged example intended to establish inclusivism, claiming that “[f]or any pair of thoughts that differ phenomenologically, there always seem to be sensory features that distinguish the two” (Prinz, 2011, p. 189).

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6 Another example comes from Strawson, who contrasts the experience of Jacques the monolingual French speaker with that of Jack the monolingual English speaker hearing a news report in French. “The present claim is simply that Jacques's experience when listening to the news is utterly different from Jack's, and that this is so even though there is a sense in which Jacques and Jack have the same aural experience” (Strawson, 2011, p. 317; also see Strawson, 2010, §1.4).
While some of my arguments below will employ the method of phenomenal contrast, I will also employ an additional method. Call it the method of *phenomenal comparison*. Here we hold some feature F of a mental state constant while varying the rest of its features. If the resulting experience has some phenomenologically salient feature in common with the original, then that provides a good reason to think that feature F is what accounts for it, and that feature F therefore makes a constitutive contribution to the phenomenological character of each. An example that makes use of this method comes from Graham, Horgan, and Tienson (2009, p. 530): “If you contrast consciously wondering whether New Hampshire rabbits have long tails with consciously believing that New Hampshire rabbits have long tails, you will notice […] that there is something phenomenologically that remains the same in consciousness”. This is also the method I applied to melodies above: start with the experience of the melody of ‘Happy Birthday’ played loudly on a piano. Hold the sequence of pitches constant, and vary the volume and timbre by playing it softly on a guitar. Something phenomenologically salient is shared between the two, and the best candidate is the experience of the pitches of the notes making up the melody. So, the consciousness of the tones’ pitches makes a contribution to both experiences’ phenomenological characters.

In the present context, the method invites us to take two or more experiences with the *same* empty content and vary the intuitive or sensory content that accompanies them. If we can vary the intuitive components of those states while keeping the empty component constant, *and* if in doing so the states *still* have something phenomenologically salient in common, we will have a good reason to think that the empty component makes a constitutive contribution to the phenomenological character of the experiences being compared. Instead, then, of explaining the phenomenological *difference* between two experiences with the *same* intuitive content in terms of some non-intuitive feature had by one but not the other, this method invites us to explain the phenomenological *sameness* of two experiences with *different* intuitive content in terms of a non-intuitive feature shared by both.

3. The Argument from Phenomenal Comparison
One way to test whether inclusivism is right is through the method of phenomenal comparison: take an empty intention, independently vary the intuitive content that accompanies it, and see whether or not something phenomenologically salient remains constant across the experiences being compared. I think this is obviously the case. Start with the following example: while perceiving the exterior of my house, I entertain the proposition *<my house is blue>*. Now suppose that I turn away from my house or close my eyes and merely think *<my house is blue>*. Does something phenomenologically salient remain constant despite this variation? Indeed it does: I continue to consciously think that my house is blue.

This point does not establish much. After all, perceptual experience is not the only sort of intuitive state I might be in. Perhaps after I stopped perceiving the house, I *imagined* the house. And surely imagination and perception have enough in common to explain the common phenomenological character of the two experiences.

We can, however, vary whatever imaginative acts I engage in as well. While perceiving a park and thinking that my house is blue, suppose that I imagine a barking dog. Or nothing at all. It does not seem as though all of our empty conscious thinking is accomplished with the aid of imaginative acts. What, for instance, would count as the intuitive, imaginative act corresponding to the thought expressed by the previous sentence?

Even if, moreover, some intuitive presentation or other of my house were necessary for me to think that my house is blue when I am not perceiving it, there is no *specific* intuitive presentation such that experiencing *it* is necessary for me to think that. I can vary the intuitive content of any perceptual or imaginative act while keeping the thought that my house is blue constant. This is true of perception as well. I can imagine or perceive my house from up close, or from far away, from up above, and so on. But as I vary those intuitive contents and keep the thought *<my house is blue>* constant, something phenomenologically salient remains constant, namely my conscious thought that my house is blue. No complete account of what it is like to be me could fail to mention that I am consciously thinking that my house is blue.

Note, furthermore, that the perceptual and imaginative experiences might differ among themselves dramatically in their phenomenological character, so appealing to the similarity of the many intuitive contents in question hardly helps explain the constant phenomenological character that obtains across those acts. I invite you to think that your childhood home was pleasant (and hope you think truly). Countless imaginative presentations might be apposite to
that thought, many of which do not resemble one another at all. You might have imagined your house as seen from across the street. But you might have imagined your bedroom or kitchen as seen from inside. You might imagine, or not, the members of your household who contributed to its pleasantness. You might imagine events that were particularly pleasant. Unless you grew up in an extremely unique household, those presentations do not resemble one another. But I suspect that those imaginative experiences do have something phenomenologically salient in common, namely that in each one you were consciously thinking that your childhood home was pleasant.

What sort of intuitive content, then, might remain constant across those experiences in which I think <my house is blue>? The best contender is verbal imagery. In thinking <my house is blue>, I say or hear the sentence in ‘inner speech’. And this might provide the feature that remains constant while my perceptual and object-directed imaginative experiences vary. “From a phenomenological perspective”, write Tye and Wright (2011, p. 329),

> thinking a thought is much like running a sentence through one’s head and/or (in some cases) having a mental image in mind together with (in some cases) an emotional/bodily response and a feeling of effort if the thought is complex or difficult to grasp.

That does seem to occur quite often, but we can vary the intuitive content of verbal imagery as well and keep something phenomenologically salient constant. Suppose that I am bilingual. I might entertain the proposition <my house is blue> by imagining, in inner speech, uttering or hearing the English sentence ‘My house is blue’ or the Spanish sentence ‘Mi casa es azul’. Those linguistic vehicles, which are what we intuit in outer or inner speech, do not resemble one another much at all. Neither do the intuitive contents in virtue of which we are conscious of them. But something remains constant across those experiences, namely my empty consciousness that my house is blue.

To give another example, suppose that instead of quasi-hearing the sentence ‘My house is blue’ in inner speech, I entertain a mental image of an inscription of the sentence. Again, those linguistic vehicles do not resemble one another at all. Neither do the intuitive contents in virtue of which we are conscious of them. But whether I have an auditory or a visual image of a sense-perceptible vehicle that expresses the proposition <my house is blue>, there is something phenomenologically salient in common, namely my empty consciousness that my house is blue.
One more example helps make the point.\(^7\) Compare the following experiences:

(a) You hear and understand and utterance of the following sentence: ‘Nomads live in the Arctic’.
(b) You see and understand an inscription of the following sentence: ‘Nomads live in the Arctic’.
(c) You hear and understand an utterance of the following sentence: ‘Monads live in the Arctic’.

Which experiences are more similar in their phenomenological character? Certainly experiences (a) and (b) have a great deal in common. But here’s what they do not have in common: intuitive content. The utterance heard and the inscription seen do not have much of anything in common, and neither do our intuitive acts in which we perceive (or imagine) them. But the experiences of hearing and seeing them—(a) and (b)—have a lot in common. In both cases, you are consciously thinking that nomads live in the Arctic.

This case lends itself to the method of phenomenal contrast as well. Experiences (a) and (c) are highly alike in their intuitive content. According to exclusivism, the phenomenological character of those experiences ought to be much more similar than are (a) and (b), provided it is true on an exclusivist view—and why would it not be?—that experiences with highly similar intuitive content have highly similar phenomenological characters. But they are quite different in their overall phenomenological character. One explanation is that in one case, you are emptily thinking about nomads living in the Arctic, and in the other case you are emptily thinking about monads living in the Arctic. The phenomenological difference between the two experiences seems to obtain in virtue of the differing empty intentions of each.

Finally, it is worth pointing out that words typically function with near transparency in the mental lives of those who understand them. We rarely attend to the perceived linguistic vehicles by whose means we communicate, let alone to whatever imagined ones that may or may not accompany our unexpressed thoughts. It would be extremely odd if our non-focal intuitive consciousness of sense-perceptible linguistic vehicles contributed nearly everything to the

\(^7\) Compare Pitt’s (2011, p. 145, n. 7) remarks on the phenomenal differences and similarities between himself inner-uttering “Paris is beautiful but boring” and Jacques inner-uttering “Le Paris est beau mais ennuyeux”.
phenomenological character of our cognitive acts when the objects of those acts are rarely what we attend to when we think. Rather, when we think, we typically attend to the often absent objects, properties, and states of affairs to which the intuited signs refer.

To sum up then, if exclusivism is correct, the phenomenological character of an experience is completely determined by its intuitive content. This, however, appears false. For at least some experiences with both empty and intuitive—the experience of thinking <my house is blue> is an arbitrarily chosen example—its intuitive content can vary while keeping its empty content constant. Such variations certainly affect the phenomenological character of one’s total experience. They do not, however, affect it as radically as exclusivism predicts. Something phenomenologically detectable remains constant as I think that my house is blue while varying my perceptual states, imaginative states, and the sense-perceptible properties of whatever linguistic vehicles I am aware of, and that is that I am consciously thinking that my house is blue. No accurate account of what it is like to be me consciously thinking that thought could neglect to mention that I am consciously thinking that thought.

4. The Insufficiency of Intuitive Contents

If the arguments above are sound, the sensory and intuitive content of my experiences can change willy-nilly when I think that my house is blue. And yet something phenomenologically salient remains constant when I vary the sensory contents, namely the conscious intention towards the state of affairs that my house is blue. There’s nothing unique about this example. If that is correct, it provides us with a strong reason for thinking that the act with the empty propositional content <my house is blue> makes a constitutive contribution to the phenomenological character of my experience.

I take this to be a strong argument against exclusivism. A second consideration against exclusivism is that the phenomenological character of my experience when I think that my house is blue does not even supervene on any set of intuitively contentful experiences I undergo. Start with perceptual experience. Suppose that I perceive my blue house, say, from across the street in sunny conditions. Is enjoying this experience sufficient for entertaining the thought <my house is blue>? Surely not. I could think all kinds of things, such as <there is a house> or <that’s my
favorite color>. I could even fail to consciously think of the house at all—think of all the objects of which you are presently perceptually aware, and even focused upon, but are not consciously thinking about, such as, for starters, the sense-perceptible properties of the words on this page. Merely citing the fact that I have a determinate perceptual experience of my blue house, then, leaves out one important aspect of what it is like to be me, namely that I am consciously thinking that my house is blue. Exactly the same points hold for imagination.

I do not suppose that any exclusivist would want to maintain that any buzzes, itches, or tickles are sufficient for thinking <my house is blue>, nor that any of them together with perceptual or imaginative experiences are sufficient. So, again, probably the most plausible intuitive supervenience base for thinking <my house is blue> is the intuitive apprehension, whether sensory or imaginative, of linguistic symbols that express that proposition.

But this proposal fails even more dramatically. Linguistic signs can be perceived or imagined by creatures that do not have any clue what they mean. Being intuitively conscious of some entity A that represents some other thing B is not sufficient for being aware of B or anything resembling B, whether consciously or unconsciously. This is true of both natural and conventional signs. A dog can see tree rings and he can see English words, but in doing so, he is not thereby consciously or even unconsciously aware of what the rings or the words represent. And you or I can be conscious of tree rings and linguistic signs without thereby being consciously or unconsciously aware of what they represent. To be intuitively aware of a sign is to be aware of its sense-perceptible features. But the intuitive or perceptual awareness of those features does not add up to any sort of awareness of the object that the sign represents.

So the argument is this: if exclusivism is true, then it is possible for someone to be in a state that is phenomenologically just like mine when I emptily think that my house is blue even if their experience contains nothing more than the same intuitive content as mine. But this seems false. The intuitive content of perceptual and imaginative acts is insufficient for my thinking that my house is blue, even in cases in which the contents of those acts are of my house and present it as blue. In the case of intuitive acts directed towards signs, whether linguistic or nonlinguistic, their content not only fails to ensure that I am thinking that my house is blue, but fails to ensure that I am consciously aware of my house or its blueness at all. But then something phenomenologically salient has been left out of the exclusivist’s description of what it is like to

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be me when I consciously think that my house is blue, since part of what it is like to be me consciously thinking that my house is blue is to consciously think about my house and its being blue. If exclusivism is right, we can provide an exhaustive account of what it is like to be me without so much as mentioning what I am thinking about or my thought about it. But that seems patently untrue.

As an aside, it is difficult for me to see how exclusivism even makes sense of the phenomenon of *consciously* being aware of something *emptily* at all. If a complete specification of the phenomenological character of S’s experience can neglect to mention that he is aware of an object O, or at least something that is indistinguishable from O from S’s perspective, then it is difficult to see how S could be *consciously* aware of O. Equivalently, if S is *consciously* aware of O, a complete specification of the phenomenological character of his experience—a complete specification of what it is like to be S—would have to include the information that he is aware of O or something indistinguishable, from S’s point of view, from O. If exclusivism is correct, it ought to be possible to take a total experiential state with both empty and intuitive contents and eliminate all of the empty contents without making any constitutive difference to what it is like to be the subject of that state. Since the intuitive content that accompanies an empty intention does not present the object of the empty intention—the house’s being blue, in our example—it follows that if exclusivism is right, it is not necessary to be consciously aware of a house, or anything blue, much less the blueness of any house, or even the blueness of anything not easily told apart from a house, to be in a state phenomenologically just like mine when I emptily think that my house is blue. It appears to follow, then, that if exclusivism is right, I am never consciously aware of my house when I emptily think that my house is blue. And the same would hold for all of the objects of empty intentions.

### 5. Empty Intentions and Perception

As implausible as I take it to be that what it is like to be me, when I emptily think about my house, in no way depends on my being conscious of my house, I suspect at least some exclusivists would be quite comfortable with that conclusion. The consequences of exclusivism become even less plausible, however, when we turn to the life of intuitive consciousness itself—
perception, imagination, and so forth—and observe how even it is, in its most predominant forms, riddled with empty intentions and their contents.

Take a perceptual experience of a wooden box. In seeing the box lying on a table, I am conscious of a box. It is not, to be clear, that I am conscious of the parts or features of something that just happens to be a box, as one might, for instance, be conscious of a wall without realizing it belongs to an enormous building. Rather, I am consciously aware of the box itself. Nevertheless, what is intuitively present to me is not the whole box. The whole box has, and is presented as having, a back side that would come into view with a change in my orientation, an inside, and so on. In short, my present intuitive experience of the object is inadequate because the object is more, and gives itself as more, than what I strictly intuit or perceive. This latter point, as we will see, is important. My experience of the box is not inadequate just because the box does have more to it than what I see. My experience is inadequate because the box looks like it has more to it than what I see.9 I experience it as having more to it.

Why think that my experience of the box is inadequate in this way? Suppose that my experience of it were adequate. In that case, several manifestly intelligible courses of action and subsequent experience would be unavailable to me. For one thing, I could not possibly take a closer or better look at something that is presented adequately. The reason is that taking a closer look at something is a matter of discovering hitherto undisclosed parts or features of it, or determining those features that are intuited more closely—discovering the precise shade of a seen color, for instance. But an adequately given object does not have further features to be discovered. Sense data, for instance, are often held to be adequately given.10 But if so, you cannot take a closer look at a sense-datum. In doing so, you would change the character of your experience, in which case you would now be conscious of a different sense datum. Similarly, perhaps there are certain things or properties that are adequately given when I see the box from here—for instance, the property of looking this way from here. That too is not something I can take a closer look at.

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9 The claim that the experience of a spatial object is inadequate is not, as Smith (2008, p. 324) notes, an “incursion into the pure phenomenology of the ‘objective’ knowledge that physical objects have unperceived sides.” Rather, “[p]hysical objects appear like that—i.e. as having more to them than is revealed in one glance—and we take them to be like that” (ibid.).
10 “I know the colour perfectly and completely when I see it, and no further knowledge of it itself is even theoretically possible” (Russell, 1999, p. 32).
If, moreover, I took the object I see to be adequately given, then I would not harbor any intentions or ambitions to take a closer look at it. If upon embarking on a closer look I were to discover new features, I would either ascribe them to a different object, or experience the object itself as changing. I would take the one-sided presentation of a thing for the thing. Clearly, however, I can coherently form the intention to take a closer look at that thing, the thing visually present to me in experience. And the changes that result in my experience when I successfully pursue that course of action are not, in all cases, ascribed to the object or objects of my experience. In turning the box over and investigating its rear side, the box does not seem to undergo any changes, nor do I seem to discover a new thing. Rather, I seem to be discovering more features of the same thing that I was already seeing.

The intentions in virtue of which the box’s further sides, parts, and features are emptily co-intended along with the side given make up what Husserl calls the act’s ‘horizon’. “The horizons of perceptions are another name for empty intentions […] that are integrally cohesive and that are actualized in the progression of perception in and through different orientations”. The horizons can be more or less determinate in their content. They might represent the box’s rear side or interior quite determinately, or they might represent them, simply, as having some properties or other. I might, for instance, be prepared to discover that the interior of the box is lined with felt, or that it contains some specific item, or that it is empty. What I am not prepared to discover is that it has no inside at all, or that it contains something that is larger than the box, or that, when I move towards it, it disappears. The important point is that the horizontal contents point beyond what is intuitively present, and account for the fact that the box presents itself as having more to it than what I see. Without horizons, the “things” that I see would not be physical things, because those things would be perceived adequately, and physical things cannot be perceived adequately.

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11 “It is clear that a non-intuitive pointing beyond or indicating is what characterizes the side actually seen as a mere side, and what provides for the fact that the side is not taken for the thing, but rather, that something transcending the side is intended in consciousness as perceived, by which precisely that is actually seen” (Husserl, 2001, p. 41).
12 Husserl, 2001, p. 144. Several writers have argued that horizontal contents are distinct from concepts or meanings. See, for instance, Reinach, 1982, pp. 326-8; Williford, 2006, p. 121; Dahlstrom, 2006, p. 209; Yoshimi, 2009, p. 125; and Hopp, 2011, §5.3. One main argument for their distinctness is that horizons change with every change in one’s perceptual experience, whereas meanings do not. I can mean “That is a blue house” across perceptual experiences which differ radically from one another, but the horizons of my experience of the house change with every change in my experience. As Dahlstrom puts it, “there is a new horizon for every appearing-of-a-thing at every phase of perception” (Dahlstrom, 2006, p. 209). Also see Husserl, 1973, p. 122 and Husserl, 1977, p. 44.
Moreover, even the parts, sides, and sense-perceptible properties of the box are not perceived adequately in any single presentation. It is not as though the side facing me and its properties are adequately given. Rather, even they have, and are perceived as having, further features that would only come to optimal givenness through further exploration. Suppose that my experience of the box’s color, say, were adequate or ‘self-posing’. “In the case of self-posing perceptions, the identity of the object and the identity of the perception are one and the same; I mean different perceptions have different objects” (Husserl, 1997, p. 22). But as the phenomenon of color-constancy makes clear, this is not the case. A color can perceptually appear to be the same even in experiences in which it appears differently. The box’s perceived color is not a quale that changes with every squint or dimming of the lights, but something that is discernibly and visibly the same across such variations. There is no presentation of the box’s brownness which counts as the way it appears to the exclusion of all others. As Noë (2004, p. 193) puts it, “[t]here is no quality that is so simple that it is ever given to us all at once, completely and fully.”

It is worth emphasizing, at this point, what I am not saying. I am not (just) saying that empty contents are required to see the box as a box, where seeing the box as a box amounts to conceptualizing or classifying or thinking of it as a box. I think that is in fact true, since it presupposes seeing the box in the first place, which does require empty contents. Seeing a box—or the side, color, or shape of a box—is, however, a much more basic ability, and my claim is that empty contents are required for you to have that ability as well. Empty intentions are required for you to see the thing that you can then see as a box in the first place. I am also not arguing, as Siegel (2011) does, that perceptual experience represents such high-level properties as being a cat or one event’s causing another. I think in some cases it does, but the argument does not hang on that. My claim, rather, is that in order to see a box, or even the side of a box, or even the color or shape of a box—all rather low-level objects of visual experience—one’s experience must contain empty intentions, intentions that point toward at least some of the experiences which would count as presentations of the same thing and the features and parts of the thing that those experiences would exhibit. Part of what it is to see a box, a side of a box, or even the color or shape of the box, is to undergo an experience which can be synthesized with

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13 Also see Mattens (2013, p. 89). Husserl (1997, p. 108) makes this point as well: “[W]e cannot speak of an adequate perception of a thing in the sense of an appearance of it which, as absolute givenness, would leave nothing more open, no possibilities of re-determination, enrichment, or more precise determination”.

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other, phenomenologically different experiences of that same box, side, color or shape. A subject for whom identical objects can only be given in identical experiences is someone who cannot be perceptually aware of boxes, sides, colors, or three-dimensional shapes. For those of us who can perceive such things, however, our particular experiences of them contain a surplus of intentions over and above those which authentically present the object, a surplus of intentions that can be filled in or fulfilled by other experiences that intuitively present what they emptily represent.

If exclusivism is right, however, then it is possible for someone to be in a mental state that is phenomenologically just like mine, but which does not contain any empty intentions. But on any faithful phenomenological description of my perceptual experience of a box, I am perceptually aware of a box, or, minimally, perceptually aware of something indistinguishable from a box. But neither of those things could possibly be true of someone whose mental states contained no empty intentional content. If exclusivism is right, it is possible to be in a state that is phenomenologically just like mine, when I see a box, without being perceptually aware of any box or anything that could be mistaken for one.

I take this argument to be even more forceful than any of the arguments above. Perhaps there is an austere sense of ‘what it is like’ such that there is nothing that it is like to emptily think of something, and my opponents and I are talking past one another. Even the inclusivist, after all, will admit that emptily thinking of things is hardly a paradigmatic case of what-its-likeness. Seeing an ordinary object such as a box, however, surely is a paradigmatic case. When we think of paradigmatic cases of states which have a phenomenological character or ‘what-it-is-likeness’, it is not, or at least should not be, the experiencing of bare qualia or raw feels, whatever they might be, but the thoroughly familiar sorts of experiences of being aware of ordinary particulars and the states of affairs in which they figure. So this argument can hardly be faulted for relying upon an excessively liberal conception of ‘what it is like’ to be a subject. What it is like to be you or me most of the time is, minimally, to occupy and be perceptually conscious of a world of sense-perceptible, material particulars.

So how might the exclusivist respond? One way is to deny that my perceptual experience really does have empty horizonal intentions, and instead claim that my awareness of the box consists in (a) a perception of something which is adequately given—a sense-datum, or an appearance, or the box’s perspectival properties, to name a few candidates—and (b) a thought about the box resulting from inferring its existence from what I perceive, or by treating the box
as something signified or represented by what I perceive. But this proposal, apart from whatever other problems it has, clearly fails as a defense of exclusivism. Even if my consciousness of the box had this structure, I would still be conscious of the box, and any satisfactory description of what it is like to be me would have to mention that. But the box is not present to me in virtue of the intuitive content of my experience alone. Obviously invoking an empty intention towards the box to explain the phenomenological character of my experience is not an avenue open to the exclusivist.

A second reply might be this: we do indeed represent more features of the box than are perceived, but we do not do this by means of either thought or empty horizontal contents. Rather, we imagine the other, undisclosed parts of the box at the same time. Since imagination is an intuitive act with intuitive content, the case of seeing a box does not provide a counterexample to restrictivism.

Husserl did us the service of considering this proposal, and his rejection of it strikes me as decisive. As he points out, “even appearance in phantasy […] brings something to appearance only by presenting it […] one-sidedly, exactly as does perceptual appearance” (Husserl, 1997, p. 47). That is, the same intentional structure characteristic of perception, with intuitive intentions towards parts which are genuinely or intuitively presented and horizontal intentions towards those which are not, is also present in imagination. When I imagine the back side of my house, the back side is intuited while the others are not. Are these other sides represented emptily or not? If emptily, then we are right back where we began. And if not, then we must summon yet more intuitive acts—perceivings and imaginings—to account for that. But it is clear that this latter strategy cannot work. To intuitively present an object from many sides at once is just as impossible in imagination as it is in perception, and for just the same reasons. As Husserl (ibid.) says, “even in phantasy we cannot represent a house from the front and the back at the same time; if the front side stands before our eyes, then the back side does not, and vice versa”. In imagination as in perception, objects appear from a perspective relative to my position. In order for me to imagine two or twenty sides or profiles of the house simultaneously, I would have to

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14 Jake Quilty-Dunn informs me that this view was held by Wilfrid Sellars. See Sellars 1978, §16. As the following paragraph shows, however, Husserl considered the view considerably earlier.
present the house as being two or twenty different distances and orientations from me simultaneously. And that is no more possible in imagination than it is in perception.\footnote{Husserl goes on to argue that even if this feat were something we could and did perform, it provides no answer to the question of what supplies unity to all of those intuitive presentations. Husserl’s answer is that each presented side “refers to” the others. More precisely, each intuitive presentation of a side contains, within it, empty contents that point to the sides not properly given in that presentation and to the experiences in which those sides would be given in other presentations. But then, argues Husserl (1997, p. 48), each of the presentations is a “full phantasy”—that is, a presentation of the full object—which could also exist for itself as a mere phantasy.}

**Conclusion**

The arguments above lead me to suspect that exclusivism is false. Our conscious lives, even in perceptual experience, are shot through with non-sensory, non-imagistic, non-intuitive intentions. On any plausible portrayal of *what it is like* to be a typical human, we inhabit and are consciously aware of a world that massively transcends what is given to us at any time. This is not the trivial observation that there is, as a matter of fact, more in the world than is in our heads. Rather, the world in which we live and act is consciously constituted and meant as massively transcendent to what is strictly given to us. We are continually consciously aware of the non-present, and aware of it as non-present. This is true even in the sphere of perception itself, a sphere of conscious awareness which ought—my apologies to raw feels and qualia—to serve as a paradigm of ‘phenomenal’ consciousness. This awareness is achieved, in part, by means of empty intentions. To suppose that empty intentions play no constitutive role in the phenomenological character of a normal human’s experiences is to hold that one can specify what it is like to be that person without so much as mentioning which “external” objects or sorts of objects he is consciously aware of, either perceptually or cognitively. It is, in short, to suppose that we can leave all reference to the world and the things, persons, places, features, and states of affairs in it out of an account of the ‘phenomenology’ of someone’s experience. I, for one, remain unconvinced.
References


