

# Perception 1

## *Direct Perception & Surface Perception*

Two Themes to the Course:

- a.) How are we to understand the contrast between direct and indirect or immediate and mediate perception?
- b.) Is there any cogent reason to think we don't have sense experience of the world around us?

### 1. *Making Sense of Direct Perception*

The general doctrine... [that] we never see otherwise perceive (or "sense"), or anyhow never *directly* perceive or sense, material objects (or material things), but only sense-data (or our own ideas, impressions, sense-perceptions, percepts etc.)... is a typically *scholastic* view, attributable, first, to an obsession with a few particular words, the uses of which are oversimplified, not really understood or carefully studied or correctly described; and second to an obsession with a few (and nearly always the same) half-studied "facts". (J.L. Austin, *Sense & Sensibilia*, pp. 2-3.)

#### **Naïve or Direct Realism:**

We (sometimes) perceive physical objects *directly* or *immediately*

#### **Indirect Realism:**

We never perceive physical objects *directly* or *immediately*

We perceive physical objects through perceiving/being aware of non-physical objects—impressions, images, sense-data, percepts

#### **[Phenomenalism:**

We perceive/are aware of non-physical entities—impressions, images, sense-data, percepts—but the physical world is not distinct from these entities]

[Q: *What is the connection between this older debate about perception and the question raised by, e.g. Harman, about the existence of qualia?*

Harman presents himself as opposing qualia and sense-data in attributing an intentional or representational content to experience (G. Harman, 'The Intrinsic Quality of Experience', *Philosophical Perspectives* 4).

Putnam claims that current discussions reject sense-data and impressions in name only (H. Putnam, 'Sense, Nonsense & the Senses: The Dewey Lectures', *Journal of Philosophy*, September 1994).]

### 2. *Some Claims about Direct Perception*

But then if I look out of the window and see men crossing the square, as I just happen to have done, I normally say that I see the men themselves, just as I say that I see the wax. Yet do I see more than hats and coats which could conceal automatons? I *judge* that there are men. And so something which I thought I was seeing with my eyes is in fact grasped solely by the faculty of judgement which is my mind. (Descartes, *Second Meditation*.)

Nobody will suppose, for a moment, that when he judges such things as "This is a sofa", or "This is a tree", he is judging, with regard to the presented object, about which his judgment plainly is, that it is the whole sofa or a whole tree: he can, at most, suppose that he is judging it to be part of the surface of a sofa or a part of the surface of a tree. (G.E. Moore, 'Some Judgments of Perception', p.10 in Swartz volume.)

If you press a plain man with questions, you will easily get him to admit that all that he literally *sees* at any one moment is a *limited part* of the *outer surface* of a certain body. (C.D. Broad, 'Some Elementary Reflexions on Sense-Perception', p.31 in Swartz volume.)

We commonly see things in virtue of seeing *other* things: I see the aircraft flying overhead in virtue of seeing its underside (and the aircraft is not identical with its underside); I see the table I am writing on in virtue of seeing its top; I first see England on the cross-channel ferry in virtue of seeing the white cliffs of Dover... (F. Jackson, *Perception*, p.19.)

### 3. *Defining 'immediate' and 'direct'*

"directly" takes whatever sense it has from the contrast with its opposite: while "indirectly" itself (a) has a use only in special cases, and also (b) has *different* uses in different cases—though that doesn't mean, of course, that there is not a good reason why we should use the same word. (J.L. Austin, *Sense & Sensibilia*, p.15.)

(A) *Direct Perception as Perception without Inference*

$x$  directly perceives  $y$  iff  $x$  perceives  $y$  without inference

(cf. the quotation from Descartes)

Are we concerned with *objects* of perception or *facts* perceived?

- (i) Mary saw the china dog
- (ii) Jane could see that the china dog was to the left of the Barbie doll

What is the connection between *object* and *fact* perception?

(B) *Immediate Perception and Perceiving x in virtue of perceiving y*

...*x* is a *mediate object of (visual) perception* (for *S* at *t*) iff *S* sees *x* at *t*, and there is a *y* such that (*x* ≠ *y* and) *S* sees *x* in virtue of seeing *y*. An *immediate object of perception* is one that is not mediate; and we can define the relation of *immediately perceiving* thus: *S* immediately perceives *x* at *t* iff *x* is an immediate object of perception for *S* at *t*... (F. Jackson, *Perception: A Representative Theory*, pp.19-20.)

(iii) John broke the law *in virtue of* poisoning the vicar's cup of tea

(iv) Scott is located in America *in virtue of* being located in Waco

(v) Rosemary is taller than Geraldine *in virtue of* Rosemary being five foot ten inches and Geraldine being five foot eleven inches

This seems to be a non-causal connection between facts—the holding of one fact is constituted, or non-causally depends, on the obtaining of another fact.

(Note that Jackson tries to explain it in terms of definition. But this is too restrictive—there is no definition which can give of breaking the law which shows why poisoning is definitionally a way of breaking the law.)

Q: *Is it obvious that we see physical objects in virtue of seeing their surfaces?*

#### 4. The Basis of Location

Suppose I grant i.) Scott is located in Waco; ii.) Scott is located in the USA; iii.) Waco is in the USA, but deny iv.) (ii) holds in virtue of (i). Can we show that I have gone wrong, and where I have gone wrong?

(A\*) ...*x* is a *mediately located* at *t* in region *R1* iff *x* is located in region *R1* at *t*, and there is a region *R2* such that (*R1* ≠ *R2* and) *x* is located in *R1* in virtue of being located in *R2*. An *immediate location of an object* is one that is not mediate; and we can define the relation of *being immediately located in* thus: *x* is immediately located in *R* at *t* iff *x* is immediately located in *R* at *t*...

(A1) *x* completely occupies a region *R* iff *x* excludes all other material objects entirely distinct from *x* from all parts of *R*

(A2) *x* is located in a region *R\** if *x* completely occupies some region *R* which is partly/wholly enclosed within *R\** [and *R* and *R\** are *C*-related]

Note that (A1) and (A2) need not be entirely *a priori*—perhaps we know what it is for a material object completely to occupy a region partly through experience—but our general knowledge of them does help explain our commitment to (A\*). Someone who does not deny any of the basic facts about Scott's location in Waco and the location of Waco in the USA would seem to be disputing one of these principles.

Can we appeal to similar principles in the case of immediate and mediate perception?

#### READING

Frank Jackson, *Perception: A Representative Theory*, Ch. 1-3

P.F. Snowdon, 'How to Interpret "Direct Perception"', in Tim Crane, ed., *The Contents of Experience*  
Thompson Clarke, 'Seeing Surfaces and Physical Objects', in Max Black, ed., *Philosophy in America*

Christopher Peacocke, *Sense & Content*, Ch. 4

Tom Baldwin, *G.E. Moore*, Ch. VIII