

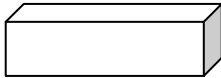
Perception 3

1. Challenging the Distinction Between Immediate and Mediate Perception

“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.)

Clarke’s challenge:

The ‘HM fact’ [the fact that normally we can see no more of a physical object than part of its surface] is not a fact. ‘Noting’ this ‘fact’ alters the original situation...producing one in which it is true that all that can be seen of the physical object is a portion of its surface. (Thompson Clarke, ‘Seeing Surfaces and Physical Objects’, p. 112.)



How much of the cheese was nibbled at?

The answer to this question seems to depend on contextual factors – what counts as a *unit* for nibbling at? Clarke suggests that the same holds of seeing – that one accepts the claim that one only sees the surface (or only immediately sees the surface) because of a shift of context.

Why think that?

Consider:

(Case 1) You see a disordered living room; you see the curtain billowing; you see the intruder behind the curtain;

(Case 2) You see a disordered living room; you see the curtain billowing; there is no one behind the curtain

(A) How things look to you in (Case 2) is the same as how things look to you in (Case 1)

(B) In (Case 1) it looks as if someone is behind the curtain (*‘That’s the intruder!’*)

(C) In (Case 2) there is nothing which looks to be behind the curtain, although the curtain looks some way

Are (A) through (C) consistent? If there is nothing in (Case 2) which corresponds to the intruder’s looking some way, how can the scene as a whole look the same in (Case 2) as (Case 1)? Isn’t that a difference?

(B) is supported by the thought that the intruder is one of the things that you can single out in how things are visually presented to you as being: the object of attention here is visually salient, recognisable as of human form and presented as discrete from most of the surrounding.

(C) is supported by the thought that we do not suppose that (Case 2) involves any form of hallucination; it is not as if there is a dagger before one where none is there. Rather, how things look to one in (Case 2) to some extent matches what is there. If there is anything misleading about this situation it is that the curtain looks some way it is not (as if filled with an intruder), not that some hallucinated object is part of the scene.

If one rejects the consistency of (A) through (C), one may hold on to the assertibility of each by supposing that (B) and (C) are each context-dependent assertions about how things look to you.

2. The Role of Immediate Objects

Even if the distinction between immediate and mediate objects of sight is accepted, nothing has yet shown that we only immediately perceive sense-data.

To show that we would need to show that we see sense-data whenever we perceive, and that how they look fixes how everything looks.

The discussion of the criticism helps show the significance of the debate: seeing things, and having them look some particular way, puts one in a cognitive advantage: one is able to single them out and thereby come to know things about them. If one isn’t so related to an object, then may be one has to know about it in a different way.

Perhaps then the argument focuses on whether sense experience allows us to single out objects in the world around us and thereby know things about them.

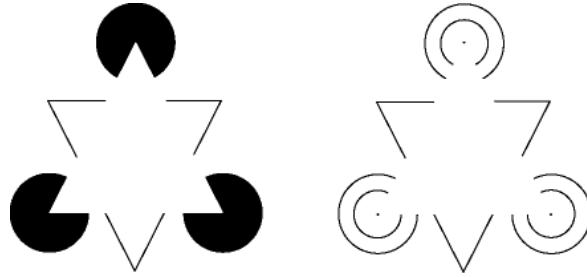
But any good reason to deny that our experience is of objects around us (and hence that we could only mediately perceive them) would also be an argument against this claim.

So we need to look at the argument from illusion directly.

3. *The Argument from Illusion and the Argument from Hallucination*

Perceptual illusion: one perceives some object yet misperceives it to be some way

Perceptual hallucination: how things appear to one is not how one perceives one's physical, public environment to be.



Kanisza Illusion

Note that in this diagram there are illusory objects (the white triangles) but we don't suppose that these illusions are hallucinatory, even though there is no object in the environment which matches how things look to one.

The argument from illusion or hallucination needs to establish:

(a) in some significant kind of case, the subject is not (immediately) perceiving any physical object; and (b) if the subject is not (immediately) perceiving any physical object in situation (a) then the subject is not (immediately) perceiving any physical object in any situation.

Criticisms of the argument from illusion often focus on (a). Why should the fact that you are misperceiving an object be reason to suppose that you are perceiving something else entirely?

The importance of focusing on cases of hallucination, therefore, is that typically we accept that in those cases (a) holds. The question, then, is whether we can show that (b) must hold.

4. *Three Assumptions*

- (A) Naïve Realism: No instance of the specific kind of experience I have now, when seeing the white picket fence for what it is, could occur were I not to perceive such a mind-independent object as this.
- (B) Common Kind Assumption: whatever kind of mental, or more narrowly experiential, event occurs when one perceives, the very same kind of event could occur were one hallucinating.
- (C) Experiential Naturalism: our sense experiences are themselves part of the natural causal order, subject to broadly physical and psychological causes.

FURTHER READING

H. Robinson, *Perception*, Ch. VI

G. Pitcher, *A Theory of Perception*, Ch. 1

J.J. Valberg, 'The Puzzle of Experience', in Crane, ed., *The Contents of Experience*

Thompson Clarke, 'Seeing Surfaces and Physical Objects', in Max Black, ed., *Philosophy in America*

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