

Philosophy 136

The Philosophy of Perception

Final Paper Questions

Your paper should be between 10 and 15 pages long.

This is a *long* assignment – you *must* write a plan of the essay before you write the paper as a whole. And you *must* show your essay plan to Joel Yurdin for approval by 22 November.

ALL FINAL PAPERS ARE DUE BY 8 DECEMBER.

(1) Carefully explain the main claims of a sense-datum theory. What are the strongest considerations in favor of a sense-datum theory? What are the best objections? Can the objections be met? If so, how? If not, what is a better theory of sense experience?

(2) Sense-datum theories, adverbial theories, and intentional theories all purport to give the best explanation of why things appear to the sensing subject as they do. Which sort of theory is most phenomenologically accurate?

(3) Carefully explain the main claims of an intentional theory of sense experience. In your explanation you may want to discuss some of the following questions:

- What does it mean to say that a sense experience has intentional content?
- What are the objects of perceptual awareness? What is the relation between what one is aware of when one perceives and the propositional attitude one is then holding?
- What does an intentional theory say about hallucination?
- What kind of propositional attitude (a belief that p? an unendorsed thought that p? or what?) does one hold when one has sense experience?
- How do intentional theories capture the *experiential* aspect of sense experience? How is having sense experience different from entertaining a proposition in a non-sensory way?
- What role do concepts play in sense experience?

What objections do intentional theories face? Can the objections be met?

(4) Early in *Sense and Sensibilia* Austin writes:

I am *not*, then—and this is a point to be clear about from the beginning—going to maintain that we ought to be ‘realists’, to embrace, that is, the doctrine that we *do* perceive material things (or objects). This doctrine would be no less scholastic and erroneous than its antithesis. The question, do we perceive material things or sense-data, no doubt looks very simple—*too* simple—but is entirely misleading (cp. Thales similarly vast and over-simple question, what the world is made of). One of the most important points to grasp is that these two terms, ‘sense-data’ and ‘material things’, live by taking in each other’s washing—what is spurious is not one term of the pair, but the antithesis itself (3-4).

Carefully explain Austin’s point here. What use is made, in the debates we have considered, of terms such as “sense-datum,” “mental object,” “material thing,” and “physical object”? Is there anything illegitimate about this use? If not, what is Austin’s mistake? If there is, what questions in the philosophy of perception should we stop asking? What philosophical questions about perception remain?

(5) When formulating the argument from hallucination, Foster writes:

When we consider the possibility of artificially inducing perceptual experiences by electrical stimulation of the subject's nervous system, it seems impossible to deny that, for each genuine perception i.e. for each perception of a physical object, there could be a hallucinatory experience of exactly the same intrinsic psychological character. If this is so, then whenever someone perceives a physical object, his experiential state is, in itself, logically neutral between genuine perception and hallucination, and his perceptual awareness of the physical object is mediated by this experiential state... (Foster, *A.J. Ayer*, p.161)

State Foster's argument here explicitly and assess whether the argument is compelling. In doing so, you should keep the following questions in mind:

- What is the principle of 'Same Proximate Cause, Same Effect'?
- What is the connection between the principle and assuming causation to be deterministic?
- What are the consequences of rejecting this principle?
- Does it make a difference if we start from a case of veridical perception and consider a hallucination with the same proximate cause; rather than starting with a hallucination and consider a perception with the same proximate cause?

(6) Compare Snowdon's formulation of disjunctivism with McDowell's. Are they talking about the same phenomenon? (Hint: contrast what account each would have to give of the case of misperceiving an object to be a way that it is not.)

(7) Write on a topic associated with the themes of the class subject to the approval of Joel Yurdin. Written approval to have been granted by 22 November.