

Philosophy 136
The Philosophy of Perception
Handout 12
Tuesday 11 October 2005

1. *Reconstructing the Argument from Hallucination*

Proposal: we show the following three assumptions to be inconsistent:

- (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.

What is the content of each of these three assumptions?

Why suppose them inconsistent?

2. *The Import of Naïve Realism*

(A) involves two commitments:

- (i) that your sense experience is a *relation* between you the perceiver and the material object perceived. Just as no relation can obtain if suitable relata do not exist, if perceiving is a relation to an object;
- (ii) that the thing you are related to, the object of awareness, can be an ordinary object like a table or chair which exists independently of you

Note that (A) seems to be in disagreement with Anscombe about the intentionality of perceiving.
Question for further discussion: why accept (A)?

3. *The Common Kind Assumption*

What does it mean to say of any two events that they are of the same kind?

If I wash my car on Tuesday and you wash your car on Wednesday, are these events of the same kind or of different kinds? (Both are car washings; both are occurrences on different days of the week.)

Compare: Is this plant the same as that specimen?

We can ask for individual objects what kind of thing they are. There are more or less specific answers to be given to such questions.

Everyone agrees that there are some differences between perceiving and hallucinating; and some similarities. The proponent of (A) is making a claim about the *nature* of what goes on when one perceives. They are claiming that that kind of occurrence is a relation to something. So the dispute seems to include some assumptions about when things are relevantly the same or different.

Note that (B) just makes explicit the assumption that the generalizing move from cases of hallucination to cases of perception is legitimate. It claims that relevantly the same kind of thing must be occurring in both, so that we can derive claims about the perceptual case on the basis of the hallucinatory case.

4. Experience as Part of the Causal Order

The third assumption involves two ideas:

First, that our sense experiences really are part of the empirical world and are subject to causes and have effects. Who would deny this? (*If experience was a transcendental condition on the empirical world, it would not be an element of the causal order.*)

Second, it supposes that the only causes we need to look for are physical and/or psychological causes. You can bring a sense experience about in someone's mind through suitable stimulation of their brain.

Note that the assumption does not presuppose that the only science of the mind is neuroscience: it does not suppose that you can explain what it is to have a sense experience just in terms of the local neurological events in someone's brain. Rather, it supposes that the occurrence of perceptions requires the presence of some local mechanism in a perceiver's brain.

This assumption tells us something about hallucinations.

If hallucinatory sense experiences are relations to entities, then those entities must exist in order for the sense experience to exist. They are necessary conditions on the occurrence of the sense experience.

So, if you have a sufficient physical cause of a sense experience through stimulation of the sensory cortex, then all necessary conditions on the occurrence of such a sense experience must be met.

This can only be the case if *either* the object of hallucination is constituted by the awareness of it (and so causing the experience is sufficient for causing its object); *or* it is not a relation to any object at all.

5. Are the Three Assumptions Inconsistent?

This is how we can show the inconsistency: (C) together with normal assumptions about hallucinatory states, shows that (A) *cannot* be true of any hallucinatory states; but (B) shows that for any state, (A) allegedly is true of, there is a corresponding hallucinatory state. So if (A) is false of all hallucinatory states, (A) must also be false of perceptual states.

- (1) S sees a table in front of her, at that time she is thereby having a sensory experience V which is a relation to the table (given (A))
- (2) Whatever kind of experience S has when veridically perceiving, say when S has V, the very same kind of experience could occur were S not perceiving but hallucinating (Assumption (B))
- (3) Corresponding to S's veridical perception, V, it is possible to produce a perfectly matching hallucination, V*, of the same kind as V, which is produced in S solely through appropriate local neural causes in S's brain; (by (C))
- (4) Any object of awareness (i.e. that S is related to) in having V* must be constitutively dependent on S's awareness of it through having V*.
[That is: *either* there is *no* object of awareness for V* *or* the object of awareness is dependent on V*.] (Given reasoning about (C) above.)
- (5) If V* is not a relation to any mind-independent object of awareness, then V is not intrinsically a relation to any mind-independent object of awareness
[That is: *either* V is not intrinsically a relation to any object *or* V is a relation to a mind-dependent object of awareness.]

So,

- (6) S's sensory experience V is *not* intrinsically both i.) a relation to something and ii.) a relation to a mind-independent object. (Contradicting (1).)