

Philosophy 136  
The Philosophy of Perception  
Handout 24  
Tuesday 22 November 2005

1. *Three Commitments of Disjunctivism:*

- (I) 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.
- (II) The notion of a visual experience of a white picket fence is that of a situation being indiscriminable through reflection from a veridical visual perception of a white picket fence as what it is.
- (III) For certain visual experiences as of a white picket fence, namely causally matching hallucinations, there is no more to the phenomenal character of such experiences than that of being indiscriminable from corresponding visual perceptions of a white picket fence as what it is.

2. *Grounds of First Commitment*

The disjunctivist rejects *The Common Kind Assumption*: according to the disjunctivist, the most specific and determinate kind of experience which occurs when one is veridically perceiving could not have occurred were one hallucinating.

Given *Experiential Naturalism* we know that hallucinations brought about through suitable stimulation of the brain are either not relations to any object, or relations to mind-dependent objects. The CKA would extend this conclusion to hold of veridical perceptions to, by rejecting it the disjunctivist refuses to draw that conclusion.

*NB* pay attention to what it is for one thing to be of the same kind as another: Do we think that Tuesday car washings and Wednesday car washings must be of different kinds? Do we think that they can be of the same kind? What decides the answers to these questions?

3. *What Does the Disjunctivist say about the Hallucinatory Case?*

One might suppose that the answer is, 'Nothing'. According to the disjunctivist the important thing to claim is that perception is *not* like hallucinating and doesn't have to be.

*Note – what is the disjunctivist contrasting with what?*

There is a 'good case' and a 'bad case' – but we need a three way distinction: veridical perception, misperception and hallucination.

Hinton: perception–illusion disjunction

Snowdon: perceiving something which looks a certain way, with suffering an hallucination of something be so

McDowell: perceiving *that* something is the case versus the mere appearance that things are so

Having a sense experience is a matter of:

*EITHER* being related to a suitable object in the environment and perceiving it;

*OR*

Being in an entirely different state of mind

But can the disjunctivist avoid saying anything at this point?

Cf. Jonathan Dancy:

The disjunctive account of perception really says that there are two quite different sorts of oasis-experience, which may none the less be indistinguishable to their owner. The first is the genuine article, and the second, though it is indistinguishable, has nothing in common with the first other than the fact that they are both oasis-experiences. In the standard formulation of the account, misleadingly, this is explicitly the way in which the second disjunct is characterized: we characterize it solely by saying that it is like what it is not. Presumably, however, there may be available a more direct characterization of the second disjunct, and in a totally explicit version of the theory it would indeed be characterized in that better way. The current characterization is just

the sort of place-holder, showing what has to be said about the relation between the first and second disjunct. (J Dancy, 'Arguments from Illusion', *Philosophical Quarterly*, 1995, p. 436.)

Note that this is *not* what Hinton does in the quotations we cited last time. Hinton takes to the two cases to be epistemologically equivalent.

That is, we may introduce someone to the idea of a perfect hallucination which is *from the subject's point of view* just like a veridical perception through the idea of a situation which is not discriminable from veridically perceiving a white picket fence as the white picket fence it is.

#### 4. *The Importance of Indiscriminability*

$S$  discriminates  $a$  from  $b \Rightarrow S$  tells  $a$  apart from  $b \Rightarrow S$  manifests knowledge of  $a$  and of  $b$  that the one is not identical with the other

$S$  discriminates  $a$  from an  $F \Rightarrow S$  tells apart  $a$  from the  $F$ s  $\Rightarrow S$  manifests knowledge of  $a$  that it is not an  $F$   
 $a$  is indiscriminable *through reflection* from an  $F \Rightarrow$  reflection is not a way of coming to know of  $a$  that is not an  $F$

$F^*$  = the kind of things indiscriminable by reflection from being an  $F$

If there is such a kind as  $F^*$ , all  $F$ s are  $F^*$ s

#### 5. *Two Approaches to Sense Experience*

What veridical perception and its corresponding perfect hallucination have in common is that the latter is indiscriminable from the former

*Modest* As far as I know it is possible that I should have been in a situation which I could not discriminate from my actual situation—one of seeing a white picket fence (as what it is)—simply from reflecting on matters but which would nonetheless not be a case of veridical perception, but one of hallucination.

*Immodest* Reflection on my current situation—one of looking at the pine tree before me—reveals to me that I am in a certain kind of mental state, visually experiencing, which is of a kind which can occur whether or not I am perceiving.

#### *The Problem of 'Bogus Experiences'*

Suppose the properties of sensory experience allegedly identified by *Immodest* are Q-properties, so that genuine experiences fall into Q-kinds. If being a Q-kind is not defined in terms of simply being indiscriminable from veridical perception, then it is possible that a non-Q kind mental event should satisfy *Modest*, and count as a visual experience when *Immodest* would not so count it.

This reasoning leads at least to the idea that our most general conception of sense experience is an epistemological one – what cannot be discriminated from sense perception. And it commits to the idea that two sense experiences could be different in their nature without having to be such as to have that difference discernible through introspection.

#### 6. *Can We Really Deny that an Hallucination Involves the Same Kind of Experience?*

The Causal Argument for Indirect Realism – or 'Same Cause, Same Effect'

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)

Foster's argument assumes that where two psychological events have the same proximate causes (e.g. pattern of stimulation in the occipital lobes), then the two psychological events will have to be of the same specific, determinate kind.

The disjunctivist must deny this principle of 'Same Cause, Same Effect'. What consequence does that have for their view of causation? Is this sufficient to block the argument?

[mgfmartin@berkeley.edu](mailto:mgfmartin@berkeley.edu)