

Philosophy 136

The Philosophy of Perception

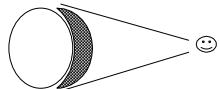
Handout 5

Thursday 15 September 2005

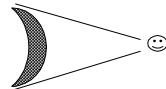
1. *The Look of Things & the Immediate Objects of Sight*

(Immediate) When a group of objects P look some way to S at t , then there is some group of objects I which look some way to S at t such that the way the group of objects P looks to S at t is so in virtue of the group of objects I looking the way that they do to S at t

The immediate objects of perception would then be those which fix the way things look to S .



Case 1



Case 2

- (A) In Case 1 and Case 2 how things look to the subject are the same.
- (B) In Case 1 and Case 2 there are objects seen by the subject in both cases which look the same way
- (C) In Case 2, how things look can only depend on how the objects seen in Case 2 look
- (D) So the objects seen in Case 2 are immediately seen in both Case 1 and Case 2

If this gives us a coherent definition, then the immediate objects of perception will be the ones which are responsible for the way that things look to us with respect to whatever we see.

For all that has been said so far, the immediate objects of sight might be the surfaces of objects, or it might be sense-data (as indirect realists suppose) entirely distinct from the physical objects we perceive. Which things count as the immediate objects of perception is determined by which things determine the way things look to us.

Question: What is the parallel for topology and politics in the case of location? I.e. what kinds of fact determine a non-immediate object of perception is seen in virtue of its connection to the immediate object of sight?

2. *The Observational Features of Perceived Objects*

The idea of a *recognitional* concept:

F is a recognitional concept when, in appropriate circumstances one can tell through use of one sense whether some arbitrary x is F

Arguably we have a recognitional concept of tomato. When in *Andronico's* you can tell just by looking on the shelf whether there is a tomato (rather than, say, a persimmon) in front of you.

Tomatoes have a distinctive look, or range of looks, such that you can recognise a tomato by looking. (And they have a distinctive smell, at least when ripe, such that you can tell by smelling that tomatoes are present.) But something that is not a tomato – a *schmato*, say – could look just the way that a tomato looks. A biotechnologist might create a plant entirely different from any tomato but which produces fruit which looks just like an heirloom tomato. When seeing one of these schmatoes you might be misled into judging that a tomato is there. So having a (visual) recognitional concept for tomatoes doesn't guarantee you are infallible in your judgements.

Question: when you see a schmato and mistakenly take it to be a tomato, are you then misperceiving the way things are around you? Are you suffering a visual illusion?

Observational concept: G is an observational concept when, in appropriate circumstances, if you judge whether x is G and are mistaken, you must be misperceiving x .

What kinds of features would have visual observational concepts?

Many philosophers assume that we have observational concepts for shape and colour.

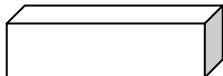
Compare the idea of an immediate object of perception with that of an observational concept:

Seemingly the immediate objects of perception and the observational features they possess jointly determine the way things look to you.

3. Resisting the Distinction

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 claims 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?

Contrast: 'Did you see the tomato?' 'Did you see the *whole* tomato?'

- (i) You can only see those parts of the tomato facing you and not those obscured by the facing parts
 - (ii) You can only see those parts of the tomato facing you and *not* the tomato
- (i) seems obvious, (ii) does not.

(DP) One immediately sees an object only if one immediately sees all parts of the object

Is something part of your immediate experience only if you experience the whole thing?

Note our argument from (A)-(D) above didn't use the assumption (DP) – rather, (A) through (D) seem to justify the acceptance of (DP). But do they really justify this argument?

Clarke suggests that what we count as seeing is context-sensitive and that this fact affects the soundness of the argument.

- (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. Perhaps we accept (B*) and (C*) relative to different contexts, relative to different standards for seeing.

Compare: do you count as seeing the church when you see a speck on the horizon?

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