

Philosophy 136

The Philosophy of Perception

Handout 6

Tuesday 20 September 2005

The State of Play

1. *Defining Immediate/Mediate Objects of Perception*

Traditionally theories of perception are distinguished by what they allow to be the *direct* or *immediate* objects of perception:

Direct Realism claims that physical objects are (sometimes/always) the immediate objects of perception

Indirect Realism claims that physical objects are *never* the immediate objects of perception (*Phenomenalism* or *Idealism* questions whether physical objects can be entirely distinct from the immediate objects of perception, assuming the latter to be dependent on our awareness of them)

But what is the distinction between immediate and mediate object of perception?

Philosophers typically offer examples of cases in which it is 'obvious' that a given object is perceived only indirectly or mediately:

- a.) Descartes's people;
- b.) Berkeley's coach;
- c.) Moore's sofa

Jackson proposes that we can make this explicit in terms of the non-causal relation of 'in virtue of holding between facts of object seeing:

One sees *o* mediately if one sees *o* in virtue of seeing some *o'* distinct from *o*

But what shows that one *ever* sees one thing in virtue of seeing another?

Jackson just gives examples in which he thinks everyone will agree we see one thing in virtue of seeing another thing, its surface or other part, for example.

2. *The Case of Location*

We can see that one counts as being located in one place in virtue of another because there is a stopping point in repeating the question 'But where in *l* is *x* located?' Eventually one comes to a region which is entirely occupied by *x*.

We have a positive conception of the ways in which objects totally occupy a region of space: in the case of medium sized concrete objects, they do so through excluding entirely distinct objects from that region. Fixing on such a case we can see how the holding of such a case makes true (together with facts about topology and politics) the other facts about location.

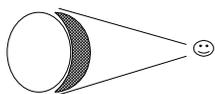
Such an explanation runs from a positive conception of immediate location to the claims about one fact concerning location being dependent on another.

Jackson's account of the immediate/mediate distinction runs from claims about one fact being dependent on another to marking the distinction between immediate and mediate. Can we reverse the order of this explanation?

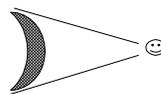
The way to answer this question is to ask: *What do the immediate objects of perception do for us?*

3. *The Importance of Looks*

The proposal we examined was that the immediate objects of perception should fix for us the way everything looks in a scene.



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

One might then hypothesise the following: what Moore and Jackson take to be obvious is that how things look to you when you look at the table must be dependent on how the front of the table looks, since the scene would appear just the same way to you if we held the front of the table fixed and took away the rest of the table.

This parallels the case of observational features: kinds of objects are recognisable in the scene around us; but it is arguable that they are so through presenting a certain visual appearance, and something could have that appearance without being of the kind in question. Tomatoes and schmatoes can share a common look. The observational features of a scene are those for which the distinction between it and its look cannot be made: no other shape can have the look that a square does. So, if something looks to be square to you but is not, then you are misperceiving.

Two Questions:

How does this generalize from seeing objects through seeing their surfaces to the case of sense-data?

Is this reasoning sound?

4. Context-Sensitivity of 'Sees' and the Determinacy of How Things Look

Whether we count as seeing something can vary with context: e.g., 'Do you see the church?'

Whether one sees the orange (or table) in Case 1 may vary with the context of evaluation. If we have Case 2 in mind, then we might answer 'No', because what you can take in, in Case 1, doesn't extend beyond what is available in Case 2.

If we just think of what you can pick out and think about, then we answer 'Yes', because the table is available for ostension or demonstration.

Do things look the same in Case 2 as Case 1? If we think of Case 2 as not involving the seeming presence of the table, but Case 1 doing so, we answer 'No'. But if we think of Case 1 as involving no more than to be seen in Case 2, we answer 'Yes'. If we think of the way in which Case 2 is misleading (seemingly presenting a table when not) we will answer 'Yes'.

Does this dissolve the argument for believing in mediate objects of perception?

Shallow versus Deep Sensitivity

'I am hungry'

'Is it raining?'/ 'Is it raining here?'

'Is Brian tall?'

Can we *fix* on a suitable index/parameter relative to which we are asking is the table seen?

If Clarke is offering a riposte to Moore (and Jackson) the answer must be 'No'

The '*HM* fact' 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. (112)

Are there other reasons, independent of the intuitions about seeing physical objects in virtue of seeing their surfaces which would lead us to deny that physical objects ever feature in the way things look to us?

That takes us on to the argument from illusion.

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