

Philosophy 136  
The Philosophy of Perception  
Handout 9  
Thursday 29 September 2005

1. *Anscombe and Intentional Objects*

I will introduce the phrase “intentional object” to mean “object” in the older sense which still occurs in the “object of desire” ... an intentional verb [is] a verb taking an intentional object  
I have mentioned the history of the word “object” to forestall any impression that “an intentional object” means “an intentional entity” (56)

That is, Anscombe does not mean to say that there is a special class of things or entities which are the intentional ones. Talk of intentional object is supposed to tell us something about sentences which talk of psychological states. What does it tell us? Look back at the quotation from Prior (itself a comment on Anscombe).

Anscombe supposes that there are two uses of ‘see’ one which takes a *material* object and one which takes an *intentional* object.

Berkeley (and Hume) supposedly mistakes the intentional object of sight (i.e. mistake uses of sentences which employ an intentional object in Anscombe’s sense) for material objects (i.e. uses of sentences which specify the material object of sight). ‘Ordinary language philosophers’ supposedly miss the use of ‘see’ which involves intentional objects.

2. *Questions about Anscombe*

(A) Are there really two senses of ‘see’?

- (1) John sees stars
- (2) Macbeth sees a dagger before him

Does the fact that we are prepared to *use* sentences like (1) and (2) show that we think that when we use them in these contexts we say something literally true?

Compare:

- (3) Santa Claus is really going to disappoint James
- (4) Zeus was indifferent to the pleas of his Greek worshippers

Do we think that when we use sentences like (3) and (4) they literally have to be true? Perhaps we engage in a game of make-believe when we use them.

Does it matter if the answer is ‘No’?

Is that a problem for Anscombe? Is there another way of formulating her main thought.

Anscombe is keen to insist that there is a further question to be addressed beyond that concerned with the material object of sight. Is she right to claim this?

(B) Do Hume and Berkeley really make the mistake that Anscombe supposes?

Does Hume (or Berkeley) make the same supposition about *thinking* as he does about *sensing*? This is difficult to answer in the case of Berkeley because he only ever talks about our ideas, and doesn’t really say much about thought as opposed to perception. Hume on the other hand contrasts impressions and ideas – and talks of feeling versus thinking.

Compare here, on the other hand, Malebranche:

I think everyone agrees that we do not perceive objects external to us by themselves. We see the sun, stars, and an infinity of objects external to us; and it is not likely that the soul should leave the body and stroll about the heavens, as it were, in order to behold all these objects. Thus, it does not see them by themselves, and our mind's immediate object when it sees the sun, for example, is not the sun, but something that is intimately joined to our soul, and this is what I call an *idea*. Thus by the word *idea*, I mean here nothing other than the immediate object, or the object closest to the mind, when it perceives something, i.e., that which affects and modifies the mind with the perception it has of an object. (Malebranche, *The Search after Truth*, Bk. 3, Pt. 2, Ch.1, p.27.)

If Hume and other proponents of the argument from illusion employ the argument in the case of sensing but not in the case of thought in general, then they are not in general confused about the status of intentional objects in Anscombe's sense. That is, they do not suppose that when you think about an object, there must be some entity in mind about which you think.

If that is so, then why do they make a mistake in the case of sensing? Why is sensing so special?

### 3. A Further Assumption

Burnyeat claims that these philosophers are in thrall to the 'window model' of vision, which he characterises variously so:

...that we look through our eyes as through a window... (83)The window-pane should be transparent, without spot or blemish. Or better, since Greek windows were unglazed, the eye should be an aperture with no pane at all. There is as it were nothing between the perceiver and the thing he perceives... (85) at the core of the perceptual experience there will be an unmediated knowing, like Moore's diaphanous awareness of blue, and when a suitable story has been told about the objects of this knowing, the problem of conflicting appearances is solved.(95)

Whether it is the flawless close-up vision or the prehensive grasp, whether it secures a whole object or only some part of the surface of one or just a non-physical substitute for these, such pictures have their origin in our earliest and deepest experience. If they elicited a smile, it should have been a smile of recognition and not contempt. For if, as Heraclitus advised, we remember our dreams, we will recognize that there was a time in our own lives when the problem of conflicting appearances engaged our strongest feelings...(108)

Howard Robinson's *Phenomenal Principle*:

If there sensibly appears to a subject to be something which possesses a particular sensible quality then there is something of which the subject is aware which does possess that sensible quality. (Robinson, *Perception*, 1994, p.32.)

### 4. Hume's Negative Conclusion

Suppose Hume is right in his positive conclusion, and we do perceive an image or impression when we see a visual illusion. What shows that we don't see the table on that occasion? What shows that we *never* see a table?

But if we are prepared to admit that there may be, even that there are, *some* cases in which 'delusive and veridical perceptions' really are indistinguishable, does this admission require us to drag in, or even let in sense-data? No. For even if we were to make the prior admission (which we have so far found no reason to make) that in the 'abnormal' cases we perceive sense-data, we should not be obliged to extend this admission to the 'normal' cases too. For why on earth should it *not* be the case that, in some few instances, perceiving one sort of thing is exactly like perceiving another? (J.L. Austin, *Sense & Sensibilia*, p.52.)

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