

Smith's The Problem of Perception

1. Some Background Elements

Smith assumes an exclusive and exhaustive taxonomy of sensation and perceptual experience. Sensations are not parts of perceptions (he denies a dual component theory)

'What mere sensation and perceptual experience have in common is not sensation – a type of sensory state in its own right – but sensory qualities, or qualia.' (185)

The account of perceptual consciousness is an attempt to answer the argument from illusion. Earlier in the book, Smith characterizes the argument so:

The Sense-Datum Inference – an inference from this assumption(25):

...whenever something perceptually appears to have a feature when it actually does not, we are aware of something that does actually possess that feature...

What the Argument from Illusion attempts primarily to achieve is the recognition that *sensible qualities can be present to consciousness in perception despite the fact that they do not characterize the normal physical objects we are said to be perceiving*. It then challenges us to make sense of this fact. (36-7.)

The official aim of Part One of the book is to answer this challenge.

That is puzzling – the argument can be blocked, if an argument, by rejecting the Sense-Datum Inference as invalid. Moreover it is not clear that *any* extant theory of perceptual consciousness denies the fact that Smith italicizes in the above passage.

An alternative way of reading the aim, and hence the main point of chs. 5 and 6: Smith wants to give an account of how perceptual consciousness arises out of sensation. This is in part a genetic account. Cf.:

Now everything they [O'Shaughnessy and Martin] say is true of mature tactile perception, but they skate over the issue of, to use Husserlian terminology, the original "constitution" of one's own body itself... *my* sensations certainly feel to be in my body. But a new-born baby's? (156)

...it involves two accomplishments that are left unexplicated: how a mere sensation can give one awareness of the surface of one's body..., and how feeling one's skin to be a certain way can constitute feeling the physical object that is pressing against it... Martin's own account is, however, as unilluminating as Reid's appeal to a natural kind of magic in its claim that sensations themselves just do give us an awareness of physical objects. (168.)

How does Smith pursue his official aim?

How does the implicit task of explaining perceptual consciousness arise?

Note two further things:

I should stress that our enquiry is at present phenomenological I nature, and will remain so for the rest of the chapter... To put the point dramatically: the distinction between perceptual and merely sensory experience is one that needs to be made even for a "brain in a vat". (142)

For Smith perceptual consciousness should also be *non-conceptual*. It is a mode of consciousness which is present in mere animal consciousness, and it is sensuous and non-judgemental. (Ch.3)

2. Mapping Smith into My Vocabulary

Smith hypothesises that sensory experience as such has *qualia* – in Ch. 1 he rejects the 'act-object' conception of sensory experience associated with sense-datum theories but:

...even if sensory qualities are inherent qualities of sense-experience itself, it is far from clear how we can avoid the conclusion that we *aware of them* as objects whenever we are perceptually conscious... (59-60)

So Smith supposes that all sensory experience possess subjective phenomenal properties in the sense I define.

And Smith supposes that his task against the Argument from Illusion is to show that at least some sense experiences have intentional phenomenal properties, in the sense that I define. (Note he is attempting to show that presence of intentional phenomenal properties and not intentional *or* instancial phenomenal properties – these are properties which the sense experiences of a brain in a vat would enjoy.)

Smith is defending a form of impure representationalism about sense experience: attributing to sense experiences intentional phenomenal properties and subjective phenomenal properties but no others.

In giving an account of the way in which perceptual consciousness arises, he thereby gives an account of how we can tell that our sense experience is the presentation or seeming presentation of a world independent of us.

3. Smith's Marks of Perceptual Consciousness

First Three:

Three-dimensional spatiality

The possibility of achieving different perspectives on perceptible objects through self-movement

Anstoss: the sense of striving and the resistance to one's force

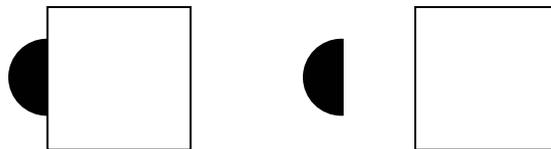
In addition: perceptual constancies (an aspect of achieving different perspectives on perceptible objects).

The *Anstoss* singled out particularly in giving an explication of *how* there can be perceptual consciousness.

But what do the different marks have in common? How do they illustrate an inconsistency with having mere sensation?

Smith has different things to say at different points: introduce 'externality' from me 'not-self'. Why is it important to call these *non-sensory* aspects of perceptual consciousness?

A simpler case:



How can Smith be certain that his experience *does* possess these features (the special role of the *Anstoss*)?

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