

## Perception 5

### 1. Three Assumptions

- (A) Naïve Realism: 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.
- (B) Common Kind Assumption: whatever kind of mental, or more narrowly experiential, event occurs when one perceives, the very same kind of event could occur were one hallucinating.
- (C) Experiential Naturalism: our sense experiences are themselves part of the natural causal order, subject to broadly physical and psychological causes.

One's sensory experience is *not* intrinsically both i.) a relation to something and ii.) a relation to a mind-independent object.

The argument from hallucination presents a *reductio* of what we have called 'naïve realism'. It does not establish the truth of either a sense-datum view or a so-called intentional theory of perception. (We can see the sense-datum view as rejecting (ii) above but holding on to (i) and the intentional approach as rejecting (i) but holding on to something like (ii).)

### 2. Disjunctivism about Perception

(A  $\vee$  B) Either I see a flash of light, or I have the illusion of a flash of light. (JM Hinton, 'Visual Experiences', *Mind*, 1967, p.217.)

Even if few things are certain, it is certain that there are what I shall call perception-illusion disjunctions: sentences or statements like 'Macbeth perceives a dagger or is having that illusion', which you can compose by adding words like '...or  $x$  is having that illusion' to a sentence which says that a particular person,  $x$ , perceives a thing of some particular kind. (JM Hinton, *Experiences*, p.37.)

It looks to  $S$  as if there is an  $F$ : (there is something which looks to  $S$  to be  $F$ ) or (it is to  $S$  as if there is something which looks to him ( $S$ ) to be  $F$ ). (PF Snowdon, 'Perception, Vision & Causation', *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, 1980-1, p.202.)

...an appearance that such-and-such is the case can be either a mere appearance or the fact made manifest to someone... the object of experience in the deceptive cases is a mere appearance. But we are not to accept that in the non-deceptive cases too the object of experience is a mere appearance, and hence something that falls short of the fact itself... appearances are no longer conceived as intervening between the experiencing subject and the world. (J McDowell, 'Criteria, Defeasibility & Knowledge', *Proceedings of the British Academy*, 1982, pp.386-7.)

#### 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.

#### 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 that  $a$  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

### 3. *The Role of Indiscriminability*

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 picket fence for 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 experiencing a picket fence for what it is — 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.

*Indiscriminability*: If two experiences are indiscriminable for their subject by reflection on them, then the two experiences are of the same basic phenomenal kind Q.

Given the need to appeal to *Indiscriminability* to avoid the problem of ‘bogus experiences’, a defender of *Immodest* relies on stronger assumptions than a defender of *Modest*. A disjunctivist relying on *Modest* can challenge the opponent to show why our notion of experience should be appropriately restricted or should rely on *Indiscriminability*.

Given *Modest* the disjunctivist will deny that there need be any general account of experience *apart* from that in terms of being indiscriminable from perception. Various different kinds of events may all count as visual experiences of pine trees as long as such events are such that they are indiscriminable through reflection from veridical perception of a pine tree.

### 4. *Proximate Causes & Competing Explanations*

- i. When S sees a pine tree, there is some proximate type of causal condition, N, in S’s body which determined the chance of the occurrence of that event of seeing (call this situation 1);
- ii. It is nomologically possible that N should occur in S even if no candidate object for perception is present (call this situation 2);
- iii. Where two situations involve the same proximate causal conditions, *and* do not differ in any non-causal conditions for the occurrence of some kind of effect, then the chances for the occurrence of such an effect are the same in both situations;
- iv. No non-causal condition obtains in situation 2 when S is induced to have an hallucination which does not also obtain in situation 1;
- v. Whatever kind of experience occurs in situation 2, the same kind of experience occurs in situation 1.

(v) is not equivalent to the Common Kind Assumption, but is it consistent with its denial?

(Note on (iii)—this is a version of the doctrine of ‘Same Cause, Same Effect’, *but* it is weakened in two important ways. First, it does not assume determinism about causation; second, it allows for the possibility that some effects are individuated ‘externalistically’ in the manner that semantic externalists such as Burge claim that psychological states are.)

What kind can the hallucination be such that perception can be of the same kind while at the same time being of some distinct fundamental kind?

If the same kind of event occurs when perceiving as when hallucinating, how can the kind of event which occurs only when perceiving explain any of the features or outcomes of experience?

Compare here the relative causal roles of being scarlet and being red. A machine which sorts swatches of cloth might separate the red swatches from any other colour; in doing so, it will sort the scarlet swatches with all the other red swatches. Is its behaviour to be explained by such a swatch being scarlet or being red?

#### FURTHER READING

Gabriel Segal, ‘Return of the Individual’, *Mind*, 1990

Tyler Burge, ‘Individualism & Psychology’, *Mind*, 1986

Jerry Fodor, ‘A Modal Argument for Narrow Content’, *Journal of Philosophy*, 1991

Harold Noonan, ‘Object-Dependent thought and Psychological Redundancy’, *Analysis*, 1991

Stephen Yablo, ‘Mental Causation’, *Philosophical Review*, 1992

Timothy Williamson, ‘The Broadness of the Mental: Some Logical Considerations’, *Philosophical Perspectives*, 1998

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