

Philosophy 132
Philosophy of Mind
Handout 14

Monday 22 October 2007

1. *Connotations of Perception*

Sense perception normally affords us two advantages:

- (A) it informs us about the world around us; when we perceive the world we are typically put in a position to know about things;
- (B) it puts us in cognitive contact with particular objects and events and enables us to single them out in thought.

There are different ways of talking about sense perception, and these are often taken to reflect these two ways that perception provides us with cognitive advantage:

Object perception – *S* senses *o* (Ellen sees the truck)

(Fred Dretske, in *Seeing & Knowing* (Routledge:1969) calls this ‘non-epistemic seeing’; in recent work he calls it simple seeing.

Fact perception – *S* senses (sees/hears/feels) that *p* (Brian can feel the hole in his tooth)

(Dretske calls this epistemic seeing.)

Arguably, these two ways of perceiving are intimately connected: could you be perceiving an object and yet be mistaken about all ways that it was? For example, could you count as seeing the Eiffel Tower in front of you, if your only description of how things seemed visually was as if there was an orange floating in the air to your left?

Likewise, could you really be *perceiving* that something was the case and there be no object which you were then perceiving?

We commonly contrast five senses:

Sight, touch, hearing, taste and smell

What distinguishes the senses from each other?

One connection here is with the idea that there are ‘special sensibles’ presented distinctively to each sense, in contrast to the ‘common sensibles’.

Colour or light would be a special sensible for sight; texture one for touch.

Shape and size are among the common sensibles.

If bodily awareness through sensation is a mode of perception, the perception of one’s body then we need to know:

What are the Objects of bodily awareness?

What facts about the body of which we can be informed?

What special features or aspects can be presented to one solely through bodily awareness?

2. *Bodily Sensation As Perception*

What are the objects of bodily sensation?

The explanation of the role of bodily location suggests either: option 1 or 2 from last time (body parts or the body as a whole). (But contrast Merleau-Ponty who denies that the body can be an object of awareness (*Phenomenology of Perception*, Part One))

What information, i.e. what facts about the objects of perception can bodily sensation and other forms of body awareness reveal? State of body, or of parts of the body – whether it is well or ill; what its general disposition is. (Note that all motor control, even simple movements exploit constant sensory feedback (see, e.g., Marc Jeannerod *The Cognitive Neuroscience of Action*), but an agent need not be conscious of how things appear in so acting.)

How do body parts or the body appear to one through such sensation? What are the observable aspects in such awareness? What of the spatial properties of the body, what of the qualitative character of sensation?

3. Perception & Representation

Some philosophers hold that we should understand sense perception in terms of *representation*. That is, they claim that conscious perceptual states, perceptual experiences, should be thought to be representational states of mind, in some ways analogous to beliefs, which have a content that represents the environment to be a certain way.

(This is often opposed to sense-datum theories of perception – the view Jackson defends in *Perception: A Representative Theory*. Jackson holds that visual experience is a state which relates a subject to a mental object, a visual sense-datum; it lacks an intrinsic, representational content, although it may be a reliable guide to the way one's environment is.)

Perceptual theories of bodily awareness are commonly associated with representational theories of perception. (Note that one could hold a representational theory of bodily awareness, that it involved the occurrence of a representational state of mind, while denying that it was thereby a perceptual state.)

Philosophers such as David Armstrong and George Pitcher claim that bodily sensation presents mind-independent aspects of the body to a perceiver. Sensations of hunger reveal absence of nutrients; pain reveals bodily disturbance or damage.

In the case of pain, there are familiar problems with this proposal, ones which motivate subjectivism:

a.) it is possible to have pain without there being bodily damage – our concern is not merely with the feeling of pain (a proponent of a pure objectivism can admit that experience of damage can occur without damage; and our interest in pain is partly an interest in feeling pain) but with how the body part is. When I have a pain in my jaw, my jaw *hurts*.

b.) it is possible to have pain as the result of damage but in a part of the body other than the damaged one – the case of referred pain. We *don't* treat the hurt as if its location is misperceived;

(How to respond? - i.) suggest a different physical state for pain to be the perception of – micro-disturbance, or the activation of nociceptors; ii.) try to divide the attitudes towards the mental act of feeling pain and those towards the body or body part pained.)

c.) There are qualities of sensation which have no obvious objective correlate: e.g. that a pain is dull or sharp; that it is stabbing.

(How to respond? - Some philosophers claim that this vocabulary is used to indicate the typical cause of that experience; an objectivist could then claim that such a feeling is partly a perception of the presence of such a causal history. However, the claim is false. Stabbing pains are not those which are typically caused by being stabbed.)

d.) What it is like to feel pain: the aspect of some body part revealed through itching is something one has knowledge of through feeling an itch; its nature does not seem knowable independent of how one feels. What explanation can an objectivist give of this? (Subjectivity in the perspectival sense.)

3. The Absence of Pain

Using our senses is a way of finding out about the environment, both whether something is present and whether it is absent.

We fail to notice what is there when conditions for perceiving do not obtain – when something is occluded, or there is no light or air.

Notoriously great trauma can occur to the body and yet there be the apparent absence of pain – e.g. anecdotes of soldiers in war; treatment of patients through acupuncture and hypnosis.

If feeling pain is a form of perception of bodily damage, under what conditions does one fail to perceive?

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