

Philosophy 136
The Philosophy of Perception
Handout 13
Thursday 13 October 2005

- (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.

1. *Consistency of (A) and (B)*

Is it inconsistent to suppose that veridical perception of the world around us is just to have a sense experience which is a relation to mind-independent objects (A) and also to suppose that the very same kind of mental episode can occur when having an hallucination (the Common Kind Assumption, B)?

Answer: NO

Why?

The kind of episode the perceiving is, according to (A) is that it is a relation to the object of perception. *In addition*, (A) claims that the objects in question are (in the case of veridical perception) mind-independent objects.

It doesn't follow just from this that a sense experience would have to be of a *different* kind if it related you to a *different* kind of entity from any mind-independent object like a table or a chair.

If an hallucination must be a relation to something or other, what kind of entity would one then be related to?

- a.) one's brain?
- b.) An image, or impression, or sense-datum?

If the hallucinatory sense experience is just the same as the sense experience one had when perceiving the table, then the object of awareness must look the same.

Question can one's brain, an image, or a sense-datum look just the same as a table?

Austin's robust response (again):

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.)

So one could show that (A) and (B) are inconsistent only if one could show that the kinds of property that an entity present to the senses in hallucination can have could not also be the kinds of property that ordinary objects of perception can appear to have.

Cf. here Moore's comment at the end of 'Visual Sense-data':

I thought that, e.g. in the case where you directly see an 'after-image' with closed eyes, it was just possible that the after-image only looked to have certain colours and shape and size, and did not really have them. I made this suggestion in *Some Judgments of Perception*, but said there, several times, that it was perhaps nonsensical. I well remember that, at the Aristotelian meeting at which I read that paper, Russell said that the suggestion certainly *was* nonsensical. I now feel sure that he was right... (Moore, 'Visual Sense-data', p.136.)

2. The Role of (C)

Why should it make a difference if we suppose that our sense experiences, and in particular our hallucinations can have ordinary physical or psychological causes?

- (1) If *E*s are relational (i.e. if every *E* is a relation between some *x* and some *y*), then in order for an *E* to occur there *must* be some *y* which is the object of the relation;
- (2) Something can be the case only if all of its necessary conditions obtain;
- (3) If certain physical conditions, say a pattern of stimulation of your primary visual cortex, are sufficient to cause an *E* event, i.e. a visual experience, then they must be sufficient to guarantee that all of the necessary conditions for an *E* event to occur also obtain;

Question: how can stimulating your brain bring about the suitable presence of objects of awareness?

3 Options

Option 1: Your brain is always going to be present when you have a sense experience; perhaps you are aware of parts of your brain.

But can your brain possess the features which you are aware of when you are aware of the table as what it is; can the brain merely appear to possess those features?

Option 2a: There are images or impressions so common and replete in the world, that whatever kind of hallucination I cause in you, of whatever kind of scene, there are bound to be appropriate images or impressions available for you to be aware of;

Option 2b: When we manipulate your brain to produce a visual experience, we also manipulate the world to guarantee that an image or impression comes to be suitably placed to be the object of awareness;

Option 2c: If no impression or image is suitably placed to be a candidate for the object of awareness, then this prevents one bringing about suitable conditions in the visual cortex to induce a visual experience.

We have no evidence independent of being able to cause visual experiences that the world contains entities such as impressions or images which we can manipulate through stimulating the visual cortex or other sensory cortices of sentient brains. These options are not contradictory but, given our general beliefs about the world, they are silly.

Option 3: Bringing about a visual experience *E* is sufficient for there to be an object present, because episodes of kind *E* make it the case that there is an object of awareness.

Compare Option 3 with the case of pain.

Many people suppose that pains are subjective in the following sense:

- a. A pain exists only if one *feels* pain
- b. To *feel* pain is sufficient for there *to be* pain

(Are pains really subjective in this way? Some problem cases: soldiers wounded in battle have great trauma, but seemingly don't feel anything; one can be woken up from sleep through pain in a limb placed in an awkward position.)

We also suppose that feelings of pain can be brought about through suitable physical stimulation. (E.g. through the use of laser stimulation of the nociceptors in the arm.)

How is that consistent with the subjectivity of pain?

Causing a feeling of pain is to cause an experience which thereby makes it the case that there is a pain – instances of pain are brought about through one's feelings of them.

Option 3, which is the only plausible option given (C), is inconsistent with (A) and (B). For if the kind of sense experience one has when hallucinating is like the example of pain in constituting or making it the case that an object of awareness exists. Then the same is true of one's experience when perceiving (given (B)) and hence there is an object of awareness when perceiving which exists in virtue of one's sense experience, unlike the table.

The early sense-datum theorists, (G.E. Moore, C.D. Broad and H.H. Price rejected option 3. We look at some of the details first of sense-datum theories which reject option 3, and then those which are happy to accept it).

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