

Philosophy 136

The Philosophy of Perception

Handout 21

Thursday 10 November 2005

1. *Pure Representationalism & the Sensational*

Corresponding to the historical distinction between sensation and perception, we can draw a distinction between sensational and representational properties of experience. Representational properties will be properties an experience has in virtue of features of its representational content; while sensational properties will be properties an experience has in virtue of some other aspects—other than its representational content—of what it is like to have that experience. (C. Peacocke, *Sense & Content*, Ch.1 p.268 in reprint in *Vision & Mind*.)

One endorses an intentional theory of perception if one claims that *there are* aspects of the contents of consciousness which are determined by the intentional content of sense experiences.

One endorses a *pure* intentional theory of perception if one claims *in addition* that there are no other aspects of sense experience.

Harman and Tye both endorse *pure* intentional theories of perception. Peacocke in this passage does not deny that there are intentional aspects of sense experience, he adopts an intentional theory, but he insists that there are other aspects in addition.

2. *The inverted spectrum*

Neither would it carry any Imputation of Falshood to our simple Ideas, if by the different Structure of our Organs, it were so ordered, That the same Object should produce in several Men's Minds different Ideas at the same time; v.g. if the Idea, that a Violet produced in one Man's Mind by his Eyes, were the same that a Marigold produces in another Man's, and vice versâ. For since this could never be known: because one Man's Mind could not pass into another Man's Body, to perceive, what Appearances were produced by those Organs; neither the Ideas hereby, nor the Names, would be at all confounded, or any Falshood be in either. For all Things, that had the Texture of a Violet, producing constantly the Idea, which he called Blue, and those which had the Texture of a Marigold, producing constantly the Idea, which he as constantly called Yellow, whatever those Appearances were in his Mind; he would be able as regularly to distinguish Things for his Use by those Appearances, and understand, and signify those distinctions, marked by the Names Blue and Yellow, as if the Appearances, or Ideas in his Mind, received from those two Flowers, were exactly the same, with the Ideas in other Men's Minds. (Locke, *Essay concerning Human Understanding*, 1689/1975, II, xxxii, 15)

Locke introduced the idea that the way in which the colour of something appears to me might differ from the way in which that colour looks to you without that difference being detectable in our manifest behaviours – for example in our use of words, or in the kinds of discrimination we can make in sorting objects by colour.



Locke's own problem here is concerned with the knowledge we have of each other's minds:

- (1) *A* and *B* exhibit the same behaviour with respect to violets and marigolds (e.g. each sort marigolds together with life jackets, and violets together with baby clothes; each utters the words, 'That's marigold!' when presented with a marigold);
- (2) When looking at marigolds, the visual experiences of *A* and *B* differ – *A* has an experience as of yellow; *B* has an experience as of violet;
- (3) One's only evidence for which visual experience *A* and *B* enjoy is the behaviour that each exhibits.
- (4) One cannot know that *A* is having an experience as of yellow.

But the hypothesis has equally been used as an argument against behaviourism, functionalism and physicalism.

(B) The behavioural facts (e.g. how one is disposed to act and speak) concerning x determine the psychological facts concerning x .

If (B) is true then there could not be two individuals behaviourally the same, but psychologically different.

If Locke's inverted spectrum hypothesis is possible, then there could be two individuals psychologically different, but behaviourally the same.

The argument does not turn on anything special concerning the *observable*. It seems conceivable that two individuals could be the same in further respects and yet differ in terms of their sense experience.

(F) The functional facts (i.e. those facts concerning the causal roles of one's psychological states – their causes and effects) concerning x determine the psychological facts concerning x .

(P) The physical facts concerning x determine the psychological facts concerning x .

If it is really *possible* that A and B should differ in their visual experiences and yet be behaviourally, or functionally, or physically the same then (B), (F) and (P) are all shown to be false.

But is spectrum inversion really possible where two individuals are functionally or physically the same?

Those who answer 'Yes', point out that it is easily *conceivable* that that is so.

Is conceivability a guide to possibility?

How does the inverted spectrum bear on intentionalism about perception?

Pure Intentionalists claim that the character of sense experience is determined entirely by the representational or intentional content that it possesses.

(PI) If x and y have sense experience with the same intentional content, then x and y have experiences with the same phenomenal character

Inverted Spectrum scenario:

There is no difference in the physical environment of A or B . Each will be correct in the judgements he or she makes about what to call the items seen, and what belongs with what.

(IS) A and B are in states with the same intentional content

If (IS) is true, and A and B are inverted with respect to each other, then (PI) is *false*.

Options:

(i) Deny that the spectrum inversion hypothesis is really possible;

(ii) Deny that A and B are in psychological states with the same intentional content

Are we so sure that we can determine the possibility of the inverted spectrum hypothesis in contrast to an alternative hypothesis which from the perspective of how we imagine things would strike us as the same?

(For more see: Alex Byrne's v helpful discussion: <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/qualia-inverted/>)

3. Peacocke's 'additional characterization' challenge

3 kinds of example:

a.) seeing objects as being the same height at different distances from one; there is a difference in addition in the way one experiences each object, in addition to the sameness in height;

b.) there is a difference in visual experience of depth between monocular and binocular vision although both can represent the distance of an object;

c.) there can be a difference in the way a scene is perceptually organized without a difference in the elements of the scene.

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