

Philosophy 136  
 The Philosophy of Perception  
 Handout 23  
 Thursday 17 November 2005

1. *Beyond Intentionalism?*

Do we think of sense experience as giving us a purely representational encounter with the perceived world?

Not only is the visual experience a conscious mental event but it is related to its condition of satisfaction in ways which are quite different from beliefs and desires. If, for example, I see a yellow station wagon in front of me, the experience I have is directly of the object. It doesn't just "represent" the object, it provides direct access to it. The experience has a kind of directness, immediacy and involuntariness which is not shared by a belief I might have about the object in its absence. It seems therefore unnatural to describe visual experiences as representations, indeed if we talk that way it is almost bound to lead to the representative theory of perception. Rather, because of the special features of perceptual experiences I propose to call them "presentations" (John Searle, *Intentionality*, p.46.)

Now, the hypothesis of the imaginative consciousness is radically different from the hypothesis of the consciousness of the real. This means that the type of existence of the object of the image *as long as it is imagined*, differs in nature from the type of existence of the object grasped as real. And, surely, if I now form an image of Peter, my imaginative consciousness includes a certain position of the existence of Peter, insofar as he is now at this very moment in Berlin or London. But while he *appears to me as an image*, this Peter who is in London *appears to me absent*. This absence in actuality, this essential nothingness of the imagined object is enough to distinguish it from the object of perception. (J.-P. Sartre, *The Psychology of Imagination*, p.261.)

2. *Varieties of Phenomenal Consciousness*

We can see the disagreements between sense-datum theorists and intentional theorists of perception as disagreements about the ways that sense experiences can be, given the constraints imposed by the argument from hallucination.

Both sense-datum theorists and intentional theorists agree that there is a *subject matter* to experience – the objects, events, properties etc. which one can perceive and attend to in having the experience. But they disagree about the connection between this subject matter and one's experience of it.

		Is it possible to have: Phenomenal Property & Not Subject Matter?	
		Yes	No
Is it possible to have: Subject Matter & Not Phenomenal Property?	Yes	Intentional	-
	No	-	Subjective

Note that one can combine a sense-datum theory with an intentional theory: some aspects of experience are to be explained by the presence of sense-data; some by the experience's possession of an intentional content.

3. *The Argument from Hallucination again & the 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).)

#### 4. 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.

#### 5. The Importance of 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 of  $a$  that 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

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