

Philosophy 136
The Philosophy of Perception
Handout 25
Tuesday 29 November 2005

1. *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.

2. *Two Approaches to Sense Experience*

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 white picket fence (as 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 looking at the white picket fence before me—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 disjunctivist starts with the following thought: there is some kind of mental episode which we know of that occurs when we veridically perceive objects as they are. We commonly conceive of that situation as being one in which we are related to external objects. So we know we need also to conceive of cases which are not so being related (i.e. are cases of hallucination) but which we do not (and could not) know are not cases of so being related.

Any theory which endorses CKA supposes that the kind of episode which occurs when one is veridically perceiving could also occur were one hallucinating. So they agree that in hallucination one is in a state which is not knowably distinct from that which occurs when one is veridically perceiving. For, given CKA, they are both of the same kind, and one cannot come to know that something *is not F* when it *is F*.

The two approaches will come apart, then, if there can be cases in which one could not know this is not a case of what occurs when one is perceiving, but in which the positive conditions the CKA theorist claims are present when one experiences are themselves absent. This is the problem of 'bogus experience'.

If we suppose that if it seems to me as if I am presented with objects in the world around me then I must be having a sense experience, then bogus experience is not possible: i.e. every event which is not knowably not a case of sense experience *must be* a case of sense experience.

This reasoning leads at least to If one holds an *immodest* conception of sense experience – i.e. one endorses CKA – then that is because one supposes the kind of thing which occurs when one has a sense experience is of the sort that necessarily one could detect its absence.

If one holds a *modest* conception of sense experience this is because one captures the idea of sense experience just by the negative condition itself: the idea that our most general conception of sense experience is an epistemological one – what cannot be discriminated from sense perception.

And it commits to the idea that two sense experiences could be different in their nature without having to be such as to have that difference discernible through introspection.

3. Can We Really Deny that an Hallucination Involves the Same Kind of Experience?

When we consider the possibility of artificially inducing perceptual experiences by electrical stimulation of the subject's nervous system, it seems impossible to deny that, for each genuine perception i.e. for each perception of a physical object, there could be a hallucinatory experience of exactly the same intrinsic psychological character. If this is so, then whenever someone perceives a physical object, his experiential state is, in itself, logically neutral between genuine perception and hallucination, and his perceptual awareness of the physical object is mediated by this experiential state... (Foster, *A.J. Ayer*, p.161)

An Argument in Defence of the Common Kind Assumption

- i. When *S* sees a white picket fence, 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, then the chances for the occurrence of such an effect are the same in both situations;
- iv. Whatever kind of experience occurs in situation 1, the same kind of experience occurs in situation 2.

The conclusion (iv) just is CKA, so if the argument is sound we cannot affirm disjunctivism.

The key assumption here is (iii): 'Same Proximate Cause, Same Effect'. Should we accept this principle?

One may think that the principle is supported by the thought that our understanding of causes connects with our conception of causal laws: there are causes and effects only where there are general patterns. To reject SPC/SE would be to reject the law-like nature of causation.

(I) Some people do reject SPC/SE in general – Anscombe and Ducasse both questioned whether causal relations between individual events require general causal laws.

(II) Others reject SPC/SE for the case of psycho-physical causation. Davidson, for example, defends a form of 'anomalous monism' which claims that mental events are causes and effects but denies that there are causal *laws* connecting physical causes and psychological effects.

(III) Others reject SPC/SE as too restrictive (Peacocke or Williamson for example) – it ignores that causes and effects may be relational in form: e.g.

Why does the boat stay where it is? Because it is anchored to the river bed.

The last restriction, though, invites a variation on the above argument:

- i. When *S* sees a white picket fence, 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.

('Whatever is present in situation 2 is present in situation 1' does not entail, 'Whatever is present in situation 1 is present in situation 2' – consistent with (v.*) there may be things present in situation 1 which are not present in situation 2.)

But can the disjunctivist consistently accept (v.*)?

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