

Philosophy 136
The Philosophy of Perception
Handout 26
Thursday 1 December 2005

- (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.

1. 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.

2. Three Kinds of Response:

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

(B) 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.

(C) 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.

According to this response relational states of affairs (i.e. situations involving one object as related to others) may need to be explained by other relational states of affairs. In turn, one may suppose that some causal conditions and some effects are relational and not to be analysed in terms simply of objects' possessing qualities.

A relational state of affairs – the boat being anchored to the seabed; John holding the glass; Eloise seeing the tree – involves a number of entities standing in certain relations to each other. Such a state of affairs can exist only if the relevant entities exist and are suitably placed to enter into the relation. This may be a *non-causal* condition on whether the relation can obtain.

A modified form of 'Same Proximate Cause, Same Effect' recognizes the need for this modification: 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.

3. The Reverse Causal Argument

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.*)?

4. *The Worry of Screening Off*

What kind can the hallucination be such that perception can be of the same kind while at the same time being of some distinct fundamental kind?

If the same kind of event occurs when perceiving as when hallucinating, how can the kind of event which occurs only when perceiving explain any of the features or outcomes of experience?

Compare here the relative causal roles of being scarlet and being red. A machine which sorts swatches of cloth might separate the red swatches from any other colour; in doing so, it will sort the scarlet swatches with all the other red swatches. Is its behaviour to be explained by such a swatch being scarlet or being red?

There are two sides to the disjunctivist’s original conception of perception and sensory appearances. On the one hand is the thought that there is something special about the ‘good’ case, the presence of veridical perception.

On the other hand, there is the thought that in the ‘bad’ cases, the cases of illusion and hallucination, one is in a situation which fails to be the way that good cases are, but which purports to be the way that the good case is.

Were a positive characterisation always possible of the bad cases independent of their relation to veridical perception, then that these cases were bad would not be something intrinsic to them. This would not be a matter of us seemingly being related to the world but failing to be so, but rather being a certain way which we might also confuse with being perceptually related. So the disjunctivist thinks that there are cases of phenomenal consciousness which are essentially failures.

5. *Mere Empty Headedness?*

To say simply that our subject is not aware of *anything* is surely to under-describe this situation dramatically. Perhaps we can make sense of there being ‘mock thoughts’, but can there really be such a thing as mock sensory awareness? Perhaps there can be ‘an illusion of understanding’, but can there be an illusion of awareness?... The sensory features of the situation need to be accounted for... If we take as our example subjects who are fully attentive and focused, we need to do justice to the fact that such subjects in some sense take cognizance of, indeed fully attend to, sensory presentations. But if so, what else can we say other than that the subject is, as the Argument requires, aware of a non-normal object?

...What, however, is it for someone to *seem to confront* something? Unless more is said, we are left without any means of distinguishing the hallucinatory cases we are interested in from such quite different states as post-hypnotic suggestion, gross mental confusion, inattentiveness, jumping the gun and so on. ((AD Smith, *The Problem of Perception*, Harvard, 2002), pp. 224-5.)