

Philosophy 136

The Philosophy of Perception

Handout 27

Tuesday 6 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.

(IV)

1. *Does the Disjunctivist Have a Consistent Position?*

The denial of the *Common Kind Assumption*:

There is some kind of event, the most specific determinate sort of episode which occurs when one veridically perceives a white picket fence for what it is, which cannot occur when one is hallucinating.

The conclusion of the *Reverse Causal Argument*:

Whatever is the most specific, determinate sort of episode which occurs when one is having an hallucination brought about through the same proximate causes as a veridical perception of a white picket fence for what it is, that kind of episode also occurs when one is veridically perceiving a white picket fence for what it is

These two claims are consistent with each other – if the event which occurs when one is veridically perceiving is both of a sort which does not occur when one is hallucinating and is also of a kind which does.

Many things are of multiple kinds: you are both human beings and mammals. Normally we assume that there is only one kind of thing you are which is the most specific answer to 'What is this?' So, the position is consistent if what the hallucination most specifically is, is also something which the veridical perception is without thereby being the most specific thing the perception is. How is that possible?

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?

2. *The Problem of Screening Off*

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? Whatever is scarlet is also red, but being red is better correlated with the machine's actual and potential sorting behaviour than just being scarlet. (If one believed that the machine selected a swatch because it was scarlet rather than red, one would predict that a non-scarlet red piece of cloth would not be selected. This is a mistaken prediction.)

3. *The Shape of Disjunctivism*

A common response to the screening off worry is to find effects that perceptions produce which mere hallucinations do not.

Perception, being a relation to the object, can explain certain relational facts about the subject: namely, that the subject succeeds in actions on perceived objects in a way that he or she does not on imperceptible objects.

But this would be to concede that wherever there is an effect in common between a case of veridical perception and a case of hallucination, that common effect is explained by the common experiential kind of event present in both cases, and not by what is present only in the case of perception.

One can give the same form of introspective report in both perception and hallucination. And part of the motivation for endorsing CKA is the intuition that how things are for the subject when perceiving and hallucinating can be the same for him or her. To the extent that things are the same, the screening off argument will predict that this to be explained by the common element.

But the disjunctivist is motivated to reject CKA on the basis that in the perceptual situation one has a perceptual contact with the object which is absent in the case of hallucination but which accounts for how things are for the subject in the case of veridical perception. So this requires that the character of one's perceptual experience in the case of veridical perception have an explanation in different terms from the hallucination even where there are features common to the two.

4. Further Properties of Indiscriminability

If the hallucination is indiscriminable from the veridical perception, then there can be nothing in the case of the hallucination which could indicate to the subject in that situation that he or she is not perceiving.

So if there is any property of the perceiving situation which one can come to know is present when one is perceiving, then in the case of hallucination either that property can also be present and be known to be present, or it must be impossible to come to know that it is absent.

Given this constraint we can predict that perfect hallucinations will produce either the same effects as perceptions, or will be such that the subject cannot know that the effect is absent.

Hence to say of a perfect hallucination that it is not knowably not a perception is to give explanatory information about why certain effects are present.

But the property of being indiscriminable from an *F* does not screen off the property of being an *F* from explaining the effects it produces.

So (III) at the outset meets the screening off challenge.

It also gives a specification of how the veridical perception is which is common to both it and the hallucination but which cannot be the most specific sort that the veridical perception is.

Hence (III) shows how the conclusion of the Reverse Causal Argument is consistent with the rejection of CKA.

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.)

Can the disjunctivist consistently claim that there is nothing more to our sense experience in the case of hallucination than not knowingly not being a perceiver?

One can endorse Smith's complaint at face value only if one adopts the sense-datum position and supposes that there just must be an object of awareness present whenever one has sense experience.

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