Perception and Mind-Dependence: Lecture 2

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1 Recap

According to naïve realism: (1) the objects of perception are ordinary, mind-independent things, and (2) perceptual experience itself has a relational structure, i.e. consists in someone being presented with an external object.

Philosophers have used the argument from illusion to undermine naïve realism. But there are many problems with the argument. The best thing to say is just this: in cases of illusion, we see ordinary things, but these things seem to have properties that they do not really have, e.g. I see the straight stick looking bent.

However, the naive realist also has the argument from hallucination to contend with. As we will see, this argument is much more powerful.

2 Developing the argument

You are now having a genuinely perceptual experience. It involves genuine awareness of things in the world. It would be possible, however, for you to have a subjectively matching hallucination. That is, it would be possible for you to have a hallucinatory experience which is, as far as you can tell, experientially just like the perceptual experience that you are now having.

So now imagine these two cases. In one case, you have a genuinely perceptual experience (as of a pink elephant, say). In the other, you have a subjectively matching hallucination (again as of a pink elephant). One of these experiences is a perception, the other is an hallucination. But they are indistinguishable ‘from the inside’. There is no difference in how things seem to you in each case. Things are experientially the same in both cases.

The argument

(1) The hallucinatory experience consists in the presentation of a mind-dependent object (rather than a mind-independent one).

(2) The perceptual and the hallucinatory experience have the same nature.

Hence: (C) The perceptual experience consists in the presentation of a mind-dependent object (rather than a mind-independent one).
The argument is valid, given the relevant reading of premise (2), so that:

If two experiences x and y have the same nature, then if x consists in the presentation of a mind-dependent object, so too does y.

The argument easily generalises. It can be applied to any perceptual experience whatever. (For each perceptual experience, there is a (possible) subjectively matching hallucination). So naïve realists face a challenge here.

2.1 Arguing for premise (1)

We can argue for premise (1) in the following way:

i. In the hallucinatory case, one is presented with something. It is just false to say that nothing whatsoever is presented to the mind in cases of hallucinatory experience.

ii. But if one is presented with something in the hallucinatory case, then it could only be a mind-dependent object (a mere image, as Hume puts it).

iii. Thus, in the hallucinatory case, one is presented with a mind-dependent object (and nothing else).

These four points can be made in favour of the first premise:

(A) It is just very intuitive to think that something must be present to the mind, even in cases of hallucination. It is not as if one’s mind is simply blank! (cf. Pautz: 2007).

(B) When one hallucinates, there seems to be an item that one can attend to, concentrate on, etc. But how can one attend to something that does not exist?

(C) When one has a hallucinatory experience, as of a pink elephant, say, there is a distinctive sense in which it seems to one as if a pink elephant is there. More generally, when one hallucinates, there are certain facts concerning how things are, experientially, with one. Arguably, the best explanation of these facts is that one really is presented with an object, having certain sensible qualities. (Compare C. D. Broad’s defense of the phenomenal principle from the first lecture.)

These first three points are all made by A. D. Smith in the following passage:
To say simply that [one] 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? [Moreover, 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. (2002, pp. 224-225)

The fourth and final point is made by Mark Johnston (2004). The basic idea is this. Hallucinatory experience can provide a distinctive kind of knowledge of sensible qualities. But this is only possible if such experience presents an object, one which really has the sensible qualities in question.

The case of Mary: Mary spends her whole life in a black and white room. But one day she leaves the room, and for the first time, sees a red thing. When she sees the red thing, she comes to know what red is like, and what red things are like. This is something she did not know before.

By seeing a red thing, Mary comes to know what red is like. But she could have gained this knowledge by hallucinating. But how could Mary come to know what red is like, and what red things are like, on the basis of having a hallucination, if her hallucination did not involve awareness of something red? Here is how Johnston puts the point:

I can learn from my hallucination what a certain shade of red is like. How can I do this unless my hallucination involves awareness of that shade, unless that shade is an object of my awareness? (2004, p. 131)

But we can also ask: how can a shade of red be the object of an experience, unless the experience itself presents to one an object with that very shade?

We can bolster the argument, perhaps, by considering after-images:

![Fig1](image)

The after-image experience seems to acquaint you with a shade of blue (cyan). But how could it do this without presenting to you an object that instantiates that specific shade of blue (cyan)?
In favour of the second premise, the following two things can be said:

(D) Hallucinatory experience does not present mind-independent things. But what else could the object of hallucination be, if not a mind-dependent thing?

(E) The object of a hallucinatory experience seems only to exist when one is aware of it, and seems to cease to exist when one is not aware of it. The best way to explain this is to say that the object is mind-dependent, i.e. dependent for its being on the experience one has.

2.2 Arguing for premise (2)

Perceiving and hallucinating are different. But the kind of experience involved in each case may be the same. As Johnston explains, we must draw:

...a distinction between the fact that someone is hallucinating, which entails that he is not seeing, and the fact that he is enjoying an act of awareness of a certain kind...namely the act of awareness that happens to be involved in hallucination. The point of the distinction is to suggest that this second is a kind of act that might happen to occur in non-hallucinatory cases as well.

(Johnston: 2004, p. 115)

The argument for premise (2)—i.e. the premise that the perceptual experience and the hallucinatory experience have the same nature—is essentially this:

i. The perceptual experience and the hallucinatory experience are 'subjectively indistinguishable'.

ii. If two experiences are 'subjectively indistinguishable', then they have the same basic nature.

iii. Therefore: the perceptual and the hallucinatory experience have the same basic nature.

Here is how Foster puts the point:

...once we have come to accept the presence of...internal objects of awareness in the case of hallucination, it then becomes tempting to recognize their presence in the case of perception...too. For if perception and hallucination have the same subjective character [i.e. seem the same 'from the inside'], the simplest and most obvious way of accounting for this would be to suppose that they also have, at the fundamental level of description, the same psychological character through and through...(2000, p. 8)
Arguably, we can motivate ii. on general methodological grounds:

In general, it is a sound methodological principle to assume that two things which can't be told apart are relevantly similar until one finds reason to overturn that assumption. (Martin: 1997, p. 81)

The idea that ‘subjective indistinguishables’ must share the same basic or fundamental nature—so that one presents only a mind-dependent object given that the other does—is a powerful idea, which has driven much work in the philosophy of mind. (For a defence of this idea, see Crane: 2005.)

(N.b. We can also motivate premise (2) by appealing to causal considerations. We will go into this in more detail in the final lecture (i.e. 4).)

### 2.3 A note about the argument

Note that premise (1) may not be necessary to refute naïve realism. We only really need the ‘sameness of nature’ premise, given the evident fact that hallucinations do not present ordinary, mind-independent things:

**(1*)** The hallucinatory experience does not consist in the presentation of ordinary, mind-independent things.

**(2*)** The perceptual and the hallucinatory perceptual experience have the same nature.

Therefore:

**(3*)** The perceptual experience does not consist in the presentation of ordinary, mind-independent things.

However, it has been traditional to use the argument from hallucination, not only to refute naïve realism, but also to establish the further claim that perceptual experiences present mind-dependent things to subjects.

### 3 Some ways of coping

In the rest of the lecture, we will consider some ways of living with the conclusion forced upon us by the argument from hallucination. First we will consider a representative realist (or indirect realist) view, of the sort that Locke arguably endorsed. Then we will consider some non-realist views, namely the idealism of Berkeley, and the phenomenalism of later thinkers, e.g. J. S. Mill and Bertrand Russell.
3.1 Representative Realism

The conclusion of the argument tells us something about the nature of perceptual experience, or about its structure. It tells us, in particular, that each perceptual experience consists in the presentation of a mind-dependent thing.

Does it follow from this that we only perceive or sense mere ‘images’, mere mind-dependent things? Not necessarily. We can also allow that perceptual experiences have ‘indirect objects’, which ‘represent’ their direct ones.

Tom perceives a lavender bush = (i) Tom has a perceptual experience, which consists in the presentation of a mind-dependent, mental object. (ii) The lavender bush is the cause of the perceptual experience Tom has.

The direct object enters into the structure of the experience, and so partly constitutes it. The indirect object is merely the cause of the experience.

3.1.1 Background

Locke arguably held a view of this kind (1690). He called the mind-dependent direct objects ideas. Contemporary forms of the view are held by Jackson (1977) and Robinson (1994). As is common now, they call the mind-dependent objects 'sense data'. But this terminology can be confusing:

G. E. Moore (e.g. Moore: 1953, p. 30) introduced the term ‘sense datum’ as a neutral term designed to pick out whatever is given to the mind. So Moorean ‘sense data’ need not be mind-dependent. (Moore could never make up his mind about this question! See further Snowdon: 2007).

Other 20th Century sense-datum theorists (Broad, Price) insisted that sense data were (i) non-physical, (ii) non-ordinary, but also (iii) mind-independent objects, which, in some cases at least, ‘belonged to’ the more familiar things we see. This is a pretty strange view, which has rightly ceased to be popular!

3.1.2 Varieties of the view

The ‘naïve’ view: sense data fully resemble their indirect objects.

The Lockean view: sense data only partially resemble their indirect objects.

The Kantian view: sense data do not even partially resemble their indirect objects.
Q1. How can we know that external objects exist?
Q2. How can we know what external objects are like?

**Locke’s reply:**

(1*) The existence of external things, as causes of our perceptual experiences, best explains the order and coherence of our ‘sensations’ (and also their ‘passivity’, i.e. we do not create them as when e.g. we imagine.)

(2*) Given that external things exist, we can use scientific investigation to discover what these things are like.

But science only tells us about the so-called ‘primary qualities’ of things (Locke thought that these include: solidity, shape, size, texture.) It does not tell us about the secondary qualities (colour, sound, taste). We end up with:

*Locke’s view.* External objects only have scientific properties (the primary qualities). They do not have many of the properties that they seem to have (colours, sounds, tastes). In this sense, do not have the secondary qualities. However, they do have powers to cause in us experiences of ‘ideas’ with secondary qualities. (Locke sometimes uses ‘secondary quality’ to refer to these powers. So in this sense, external things do have secondary qualities, even on Locke’s view. This can get confusing, but see Mackie: 1976.)

**Campbell’s worry:**

Assume the naïve version of the view. When you experience the lavender bush, you are directly aware of an idea or sense datum, which has the colour, size, shape of a lavender bush. But you are also indirectly aware of a lavender bush, which also has these properties. But this seems like one too many bushes! As Campbell writes: ‘We seem to be faced with the idea of an absurd duplication of the material world in some other area’ (2002, p. 156).

**Johnston’s Worry**

...someone who accepted and lucidly understood the [view] would be justified in regarding the presence of external particulars as at most a conjecture concerning extrinsic connections between his visual experience and external causes. But as against this implication of the [view], our relation to the things we are seeing is not well captured in this way. We can successfully demonstrate them without relying explicitly or implicitly on such a conjectural causal description. When we see particular things, they are just presented as there to be attended to and demonstrated. (2004, p. 119)

In short: representative realism makes our access to things too ‘indirect’
3.2 Idealism

Berkeley thinks we should identify the mind-dependent objects of perceptual experience with ordinary things. He agrees with Locke that the objects of perception are mind-dependent ‘ideas’. As he says in the Principles

That neither our thoughts, nor passions, nor ideas formed by the imagination, exist without the mind, is what everybody will allow. And it seems no less evident that the various sensations or ideas imprinted on the senses...cannot exist otherwise than in a mind perceiving them...Their esse is percipi, nor is it possible they should have any existence, out of the minds of thinking things which perceive them (1710, §3)

Berkeley does not really argue for this assumption in the Principles. But he does appeal to the argument from illusion in Three Dialogues. (See Robinson: 1985 for a Berkelean argument using the argument from hallucination.)

The essence of the view is set out here:

It is indeed an opinion strangely prevailing amongst men, that houses, mountains, rivers, and in a word all sensible objects have an existence natural or real, distinct from their being perceived...[Yet this involves] a manifest contradiction. For what are the fore-mentioned objects but the things we perceive by sense, and what do we perceive besides or own ideas or sensations’ and is it not plainly repugnant that any one of these or any combination of them should exist unperceived? (1710, §4)

Can’t ordinary things continuing existing unperceived by us? Yes, God perceives them ‘all the while’.

3.3 Phenomenalism

According to Phenomenalism, ordinary physical things are ‘constructions’ out of actual and possible sense data (J. S. Mill, Bertrand Russell).

According to the phenomenalist, to believe that a material or physical object of a certain sort exists is just to believe that sense-data of various sorts have been experienced, are being experienced, will be experienced, and/or would be experienced under certain specifiable conditions. (Laurence: 2016, §2.1)

Notably, Berkeley himself may have anticipated such a view:

The table I write on, I say, exists, that is, I see and feel it; and if I were out of my study I should say it existed, meaning thereby that if I was in my study I might perceive it, or that some other spirit actually does perceive it... (1710, §3)
Bibliography


