Perception and Mind-Dependence: Lecture 4

(Alex Moran, apm60@cam.ac.uk)

1 Recap

We considered several of the standard arguments against sense data. We saw that none of them were conclusive. But we did note that a sense datum view seems not to accurately capture the kind of contact we have with the world through perception. So we should hold out for a different view. We also criticised adverbialism on various grounds. So let us look elsewhere...

2 Intentionalism

Intentionalism also tries to do without sense data. Like adverbialism, it rejects premise (1) of the argument from hallucination, whilst accepting premise (2). And like adverbialism, it denies that a perceptual experience is, a relation of awareness between a subject and a suitable object.

Intentionalism is sometimes described as the view that experiences have, or are directed upon, objects. Here they take inspiration from Franz Brentano:

Every mental phenomenon is characterised by what the scholastics of the Middle Ages referred to as the intentional inexistence [directedness] of the mental, and what we would call relation to a content, direction upon an object or immanent objectivity...Every mental phenomenon includes something as object within itself. In presentation something is presented, in judgement something is affirmed or denied, in love loved, in hate hated, in desire desired and so on. (1874, p. 88)

However, it is unclear whether this defines a distinctive view. Naïve realists and sense data theorists will allow that experiences are directed on objects. Even adverbialists will allow that perceptions are directed on their causes.

What is really fundamental to the theory is the idea that experiences represent the world as being certain ways, and are hence akin to beliefs or thoughts. In other words, what is fundamental is the idea that sensory experiences are representational states.

When I believe that a is F, then I am in a mental state which represents the world as being a certain way, viz. such that a is F. This mental state represents things correctly just in case a really is F. Otherwise, my mental state misrepresents how things really are.
When I believe e.g. that \( a \) is F, my belief has as its intentional content the proposition that \( a \) is F. The intentional mode, attitude, or relation that is involved is the relation of belief itself. Thus, intentional states like beliefs are typically called propositional attitudes (B. Russell’s term).

*To have the belief* \( a \) is F *is for me to stand in the belief relation to the proposition* that \( a \) is F. The belief-state itself thus consists in my bearing the relation of belief to a proposition. The intentionalist offers a similar analysis of perceptual experience. *To have a perceptual experience* is to stand in some intentional relation to some appropriate intentional content, which, as in the case of belief, is usually take to be a proposition.

In one sense, then, intentionalists think of experiences as relational events: i.e. events constituted by the holding of a relation. However—and this is important—the intentionalist denies that experiences consist in the relation of awareness holding between a subject and some experienced item. In this sense—the sense that is usually relevant to the philosophy of perception—intentionalists deny that experience is relational. In older terminology, they deny that experience has act-object structure.

(A different way to think of intentionalism: experiences are really monadic states of subjects, which can be modelled as relations to propositions. See Crane: 2013 for this suggestion.)

What is the intentional content involved in experiencing? The standard view is that experiential content is propositional (Searle: 1983, Byrne: 2009, Crane: 2009a). If you experience a red round object, then the content of your experience will be the proposition that some \( x \) is red and round.

What is the intentional mode involved in experiencing? Early views used to say that this was belief (Armstrong: 1968, Pitcher: 1971). But it is possible to have an experience without believing. Consider the Müller-Lyer illusion:

![Müller-Lyer Illusion](image)

*Fig. 1*

You experience the lines as different lengths. You do not believe that the lines are different lengths. Therefore: experience is not belief.
Contemporary intentionalists take the intentional mode (relation, attitude) involved in experiencing to be a theoretical posit. (Byrne: 2009, Pautz: 2010). It is not a relation we have a name for in English. But we can call it ‘Ex-ing’.

4.1 Virtues of intentionalism

We get a nice account of illusory experience in terms of misrepresentation. The lines are equal, but they are experienced as being different in length. The intentionalist can explain this as follows: to have the experience involved in the Müller-Lyer illusion is to misrepresent one’s environment. One ‘visually says’ that line A is shorter than line B, but this is not in fact so.

It is also often said that we get a nice account of hallucinations—one that is ontologically conservative in that it does not require postulating sense data. It is a well known-feature of representation that one can represent what does not exist. One can believe that the Fountain of Youth is nearby even if the Fountain of Youth does not exist. So intentionalists can say that hallucination is just the familiar case of representing what does not exist.

(Note that this may not represent any genuine advance if, as some philosophers think, there is a substantive question as to how mental representation of the non-existent is possible (see here Crane: 2001b)

It is also often said that intentionalism is an improvement on adverbialism, in that it explains why experience seems to be relational (in the act-object sense) despite not really being so. The basic idea is that an intentional state, unlike an adverbial state, is essentially directed upon its objects.

4.2 Objections

(1) How do we account for the seeming presentation of an object in hallucination, and for the seeming possibility of attending to something?

The intentionalist needs to say a bit more about the fact that experiences seem to involve the sensory presentation of an object. Being ‘directed’ at an object is not enough: after all, beliefs are also ‘directed’ at objects in this way.

(2) How do we account for the special kind of knowledge that hallucinatory experience can provide of sensible qualities?

One natural way to explain this is in terms of objects with those qualities being presented in hallucination. What can an intentionalist say instead?
Adam Pautz (2010) says that we can answer this question by saying that the relevant qualities are part of the **content** of the experience. But these qualities are also part of the content of belief. (Perhaps we can appeal to the intentional mode as well as the content. But remember that the mode is just a theoretical posit, which we had never heard of before doing philosophy.)

(3) Belief and perception seem to be radically different states. Can the intentionalist account for this?

Not obviously, since all that differs is the intentional mode involved. So a hitherto unheard of theoretical posit is being made to do an awful lot of work! (Those who deny that the intentional content of belief is propositional may have more options here. See Crane: 2009b for this type of view.)

5 Against Factorization

Every view of experience which accepts premise (2) of the argument from hallucination—i.e. that the perceptual and the hallucinatory experience have the same nature—has to **factorize** genuinely perceptual experience into two components: the experience part, and the perceiving part. We have the experience which is a **common factor** across 'good' and 'bad' cases. And then we have that which makes the experience a perception of some object.

An intentionalist might appeal to the difference between **satisfied** and unsatisfied content to explain the difference. (That is, she could appeal to the representation vs. misrepresentation distinction.) But this won't do, due to the possibility of **veridical hallucination**. Here, we have an experience whose **content is satisfied**, but which is **not a genuine perception**.

Another option is to appeal to causation. But there are counter-examples:

1. My brain state at t1 causes a hallucinatory experience at t2. Yet I do not see my brain!

2. The perceptual experience of the statue is caused by the atoms that compose the statue acting together. But it is also caused by the entire statue (Merricks: 2001). But whilst I see the statue, I do not see the atoms.

(Cf. Grice: 1961 and Johnston: 2007.) At this point, we might appeal to 'appropriate causation'. **But it notoriously hard to pin down this idea.**

Our question is: What possible relation could make the difference between a perception and a hallucination? Do ‘common factor theorists’ have to say that the difference is **brute** or **inexplicable**? **This seems rather implausible.**
1. There has to be an explanation as to why $e_1$ is a perception of x, whilst $e_2$ is not.

2. But, given the common factor view, there is no explanation as to why $e_1$ is a perception of x, whilst $e_2$ is not.

Therefore

3. The common factor view is false.

6 Disjunctivism

A disjunctivist position rejects the claim that perceptual and hallucinatory experiences must have the same nature—even when they are subjectively indistinguishable. The main motivation is that of retaining naïve realism. Hinton (1973) is often credited as the founder of this approach, although some of the ideas can already be found in Austin (1962). (For an important discussion of these matters, see Snowdon: 2008). Forms of disjunctivism are developed in Snowdon (1981), McDowell (1982) and Martin (2004, 2006).

The primary motivation for premise (2) is the idea that if two experiences are subjectively indistinguishable, then they must have the same nature. This is indeed a compelling idea, but disjunctivists reject it. As Martin says:

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. The naïve realist [disjunctivist] will be someone who thinks that just such reason can be found for distinguishing between veridical perceptions and illusory or hallucinatory ones. (1997, pp. 81—82)

Note: naïve realism and disjunctivism are separate ideas. One way to retain naïve realism in light of the argument from hallucination is to adopt a disjunctivist position. But non-naïve-realists may also be attracted to a disjunctivist view. (We will focus here on naïve realist disjunctivism.)

Why is the view called ‘disjunctivism’? The fundamental idea is that having an experience is either a matter of having a perceptual experience, or else a matter of having a hallucinatory experience, whereby the two sorts of experience mentioned here have different natures. As Snowdon says:

The experience in a genuinely perceptual case has a different nature to the experience involved in a non-perceptual case....The experience in the perceptual case in its nature reaches out and involves the perceived external object, not so the experience in the other cases. (2005a, pp. 136-137)
It follows that experience-claims have ‘disjunctive’ truth-conditions. There are two very different ways in which they can be made true.

7 ‘Positive’ vs. ‘Negative’ Disjunctivism

Most disjunctivists accept naïve realism about perceptual experience. An important question to ask, however, is this: what should a disjunctivist say about hallucinatory experiences? What is the nature of such episodes?

The disjunctive account of perception really says that there are two quite different sorts of oasis-experience, which may none the less be indistinguishable to their owner. The first is the genuine article, and the second, though it is indistinguishable, has nothing in common with the first other than the fact that they are both oasis-experiences. In the standard formulation of the account, misleadingly, this is explicitly the way in which the second disjunct is characterized: we characterize it solely by saying that it is like what it is not. Presumably, however, there may be available a more direct characterization of the second disjunct, and in a totally explicit version of the theory it would indeed be characterized in that better way. The current characterization is just the sort of place-holder, showing what has to be said about the relation between the first and second disjunct. (Dancy, 1995, p. 436)

We can think about this issue in terms of the argument from hallucination. Should the naïve realist disjunctivist accept premise (1) (or anything like it)?

Those who accept premise (1) might be called ‘Austinian Disjunctivists’. The arguer from hallucination first argues that hallucinatory experience consists in the presentation of mind-dependent objects. She then attempts to generalise this across the board, by relying on the idea that the perception and the hallucination are subjectively indistinguishable. Here is what J. L. Austin, in Sense and Sensibilia, has to say about this idea:

But if we are prepared to admit that there may be, even that there are, some cases in which ‘delusive and veridical perceptions’ really are indistinguishable, does this admission require us to drag in, or even to let in, sense-data? No. For even if we were to make the prior admissions (which we have so far found no reason to make) that in ‘abnormal’ cases we perceive sense-data, we should not be obliged to extend this admission to the ‘normal’ cases too. For why on earth should it not be the case that, in some few instances, perceiving one sort of thing is exactly like perceiving another? (1962, p. 52)

A real lemon, and a cleverly painted bar of soap, might be indiscriminable: try as you might, you just cannot tell them apart. Yet they are very different. Austin thinks that we can say essentially the same thing about experiences. (Recall H. H. Price’s claim, that if one were to go from being aware of an external thing to being aware of a sense datum, one ‘should expect at least a jerk or a flicker as the one is replaced by the other’. Austin rejects this idea.)
To adopt this kind of view is to adopt a version of ‘positive disjunctivism’. What such views have in common is this: they agree that hallucinatory experiences have act-object structure, i.e. present things to subjects. Such views are well-placed to account for this intuitions driving premise (i).

A positive disjunctivist does not, however, have to say that the objects of a hallucinatory experience are mind-dependent. Other views have been defended. See Johnston (2004), Knight (2013), Smith (2002). Hence, there are forms of positive disjunctivism which actually reject premise (i). (Though note: these views still seem well-placed to accept the intuitions driving it.)

A ‘negative disjunctivist’, by contrast, rejects the idea that hallucinatory experiences have act-object structure. One version of this view is Martin’s epistemic account. We will shortly consider an argument for this position.

My own view (for what it’s worth) is that Austinian Disjunctivism seems attractive. There is a strong case for saying that premise (i) is true. So we should rescue naïve realism by denying (2). But most naïve realists in the contemporary literature accept a rather different type of account.

8 The Epistemic View

According to Martin (2004, 2006), naïve realists must accept that perceiving involves having one experience which falls under two different kinds. If Kp is the perceptual kind, and Kh is the hallucinatory kind, then we accept that:

To perceive is to undergo an experience that satisfies both Kp and Kh.

Now for an experience to satisfy Kp is for it to present external objects. But what is it for an experience to satisfy Kh?

Crucially, Martin denies that falling under Kh is a matter of presenting mind-dependent sense data, or indeed of presenting anything at all. So Martin thinks that naïve realists should be negative disjunctivists.

IDEA: To have an hallucinatory experience is just to be in a condition that is indistinguishable, through reflection alone, from a veridical perception.

(E) S has a hallucinatory experience as of an F just in case: S cannot know, through reflection alone, that S is genuinely perceiving an F.

The veridical perception consists, most fundamentally, in the presentation of an F. But because it is a veridical perception of an F, one cannot know, through reflection alone (or indeed in any other way), that it is not a
veridical perception of an F. (One cannot know that something is not an F given that it is an F. Knowledge is factive: one only knows what is the case.)

So the perceptual experience has the nature that naïve realists say it does. It falls under naïve realist kind Kp. But it also falls under the hallucinatory kind Kh. (It also meets the negative epistemological condition). No problem!

Questions:

(Q1) How could having an experience merely consist in meeting a ‘negative epistemological condition’?

(Q2) A stone cannot tell through reflection that it is not having a veridical experience. But it is not experiencing!

(Q3) Creatures that lack the ability to reflect introspectively can have hallucinations of various kinds. Can Martin account for this? (Siegel: 2004)

(Q3) How could meeting a negative epistemological condition afford one distinctive knowledge of the sensible qualities (Pautz: 2010)

9 Rescuing Positive Disjunctivism

Recall the following question:

2. We know that neural event type N causes an hallucinatory experience in the bad case. Does it also cause a hallucinatory experience in the good case?

A naïve realist wishing to embrace positive disjunctivism should answer this question negatively—otherwise the view would be of doubtful coherence, i.e. positive disjunctivists must deny that an experience of the hallucinatory kind can occur in the perceptual case.

One way to defend this move is to insist that for a neural event to cause a hallucinatory experience, it has to be part of a non-standard causal chain, i.e. a causal chain that does not involve an external object in the appropriate way. (For this suggestion see Snowdon: 2005b, p. 303. Cf. Martin: 2004).

Whether this move is defensible remains to be seen. But it would enable the naïve realist disjunctivist to offer an account of hallucinatory experience that fits best with the manifest facts about such episodes, e.g. that they seem to present objects, and provide us with knowledge of the sensible qualities.
In the end, then, the best view might be the one that J. L. Austin hints at: a combination of a sense datum view about hallucinating, with a naïve realist view about perceiving. (This is my own view of matters, for what it’s worth.)

10 Summing Up

There are many ways to react to the argument from hallucination. Most of them involve rejecting naïve realism and embracing a common factor view. It is, however, possible to retain naïve realism, by embracing disjunctivism.

Bibliography


(See also Bibliography from lecture 3).