

## WILLIAM JAMES'S DIRECT REALISM: A RECONSTRUCTION

Erik C. Banks

### 1. INTRODUCTION: AN HISTORICO-CRITICAL RECONSTRUCTION

This paper offers a historico-conceptual reconstruction of William James's direct realism about our perceptions of external objects. According to James, under certain circumstances, we can directly perceive the proper parts of external objects, not indirect mental representations of them. In addition, judgments of perception such as "I am in some sort of room with objects around me" are directly assertable, but only if there is an external environment with perspectival objects arranged around the perceiver, not the mere play of his own sensations. I will point out some important similarities between Jamesian direct realism and Kantian empirical realism and show that James has struck a powerful blow against theories of mental representation generally.

The operative terms, concepts, and arguments of this kind of Jamesian direct realism are probably unfamiliar, even to those well versed in direct realist theories of perception, and since there are so many different forms of direct realism in the literature, it might help to state some of the main claims of the Jamesian position up front:

1. Taken just as they appear, sensations are real concrete particulars, not mental representations. As they occur, they are neither true nor false of anything, nor do they intentionally represent anything beyond themselves.
2. We distinguish between "acts" or "events" of sensation and "judgments" of perception in which it is asserted that we perceive objects of some kind. Judgments may be assertable or not assertable, but only if they are assertable can they be true or false of the objects they are about.

3. Judgments of direct perception of objects, even false ones, can only be asserted in a case where real mind-independent external objects are present in the environment of the perceiver. This condition is satisfied even when we perceive falsely and mistake one particular object for another.
4. In a judgment about a direct perception of an object, sensations are linked to external, mind-independent, physical objects through perspectival causal relations, in which case sensations are the *actual proper parts* of external physical objects perceived directly by us, *not* indirect mental representations of those objects.

In the first part of this essay, I show how James distinguished between a perceptual judgment such as “I am now in a room surrounded by real objects in space” and having a sensation of blobs, flashes, and squiggles that merely look like objects in a room in space but that bear no actual resemblance to this experience. On James’s analysis, a sensation is simply the collection of colors, blobs, and squiggles it appears to be, representing nothing truly or falsely. When considered in themselves like this, mere sensations, even if they seem quite detailed, are *not* intentional and do not have the actual capacity to represent external objects. Nor, then, do judgments asserted before an array of sensations, in a dream or delusion, really qualify as assertions of judgments of perception about objects truly or falsely. In the next part, I seek to broaden James’s insights by digging deeper into the intellectual truth conditions of perceptual judgments and by showing that they cannot be satisfied within the egocentric perspective of a single subject but require an external embedding “perspectival” system of objects and other points of view on perceptual objects that a single subject simply cannot occupy all at once. There will also be an important connection with Immanuel Kant and his empirical realism. Finally, I will show how I think James has struck a powerful blow against representative theories generally.

## 2. JAMES’S *ESSAYS IN RADICAL EMPIRICISM*

James began his radical empiricist series of lectures, published as articles in the *Journal of Philosophy and Scientific Methods*, with a sustained attack on consciousness as a thing or a substance. The first article from 1904 is provocatively titled “Does ‘Consciousness’ Exist?” In it, James introduces a neutral stuff called “pure experience,” which is the common constituent of minds and physical bodies and belongs to neither order exclusively. Indeed, these differences are only made secondarily in the dual variations that each bit of pure experience obeys:

My thesis is that if we start with the supposition that there is only one primal stuff or material of the world, a stuff of which everything is composed, and if we call that stuff "pure experience" then knowing can easily be explained as a particular sort of relation towards one another in which portions of pure experience may enter. The relation itself is part of pure experience, one of the terms becomes the subject or bearer of the knowledge, the knower, the other becomes the object known. (James 1977, 170).

James also denies that the act of conscious representation bestows on the bit of pure experience its concrete quality or existence, since the same bit would still have its quality and existence under the head of a *physical* occurrence linked to the history of a physical object. The same red patch that we think of as *our* sensation is also a physical brain event tied in with the histories of mind-independent objects, so it is not our "seeing of the patch" that makes it red. Removing the act of awareness of the red patch leaves the bit of pure experience neutral, neither exclusively mental nor physical. It relates both to external objects, through its physical variations, and to the mind of the knower, through its psychological variations of memory or association. Even calling them "mental" variations as opposed to "physical" ones does not define any fundamental difference, merely a difference of interest for a psychologist or a physicist (James 1977, 136, 193–94). Nor must we stop speaking about the "mind" of the knower or even about his "acts" and "judgments," just as long as this mind is understood as a collection of its constituent functions or activities.

Are there other bits of "pure experience" that are *fully* located in external objects that are not anyone's sensations under any functional interpretation? Here James is far from clear; he may be a neutral monist or a panpsychist or even both (see Gale 1999, 198–215; and especially Cooper 2002, ch. 2). Many passages in James do suggest an order of mind-independent natural qualities that are not sensations, as Ernst Mach and Bertrand Russell also assumed as part of neutral monism (Banks 2003, 144–50; Thiele 1978, 172–76). Mach called mind independent events "elements"; Russell called them "sensibilia" and later simply neutral "event-particulars." Most of James's ideas up to this point (the "two orders," the neutral stuff, the functional ego) are actually found in Mach's 1886 *Analysis of Sensations*, not surprising given the close relationship between Mach and James (for more, see Banks 2003, 143–51).

### 3. JAMES'S "TWO-TAKINGS" THEORY

To ground his theory of knowledge, James lays down a "two-takings" theory, in which a "bit of pure experience" is shared between the knower and the physical object, by being simultaneously part of both functional

orders as “one identical point can be on two lines . . . situated at their intersection” (James 1977, 173). In perception, a physical object, or a proper part of it anyway, is directly known by being a proper *part* of the knower’s mind, without the intermediary sense-datum or image standing between the knower and the external object, as in the indirect representative theory of perception. The directly perceived object extends all the way from the environment into the mind of the perceiver. This seems to satisfy James’s desideratum for a direct realist theory where objects are perceived exactly as they are:

If the reader will take his own experiences, he will see what I mean. Let him begin with a perceptual experience, the “presentation” so-called of a physical object, his actual field of vision, the room he sits in, with the book he is reading at its center; and let him for the present treat this complex object in the common-sense way as being “really” what it seems to be, namely . . . a collection of physical things cut out from an enviroing world of other physical things. . . . Now at the same time it is those self-same things which his mind, as we say, perceives, and the whole of philosophy of perception from Democritus’ time downwards has been just one long wrangle over the paradox that what is evidently one reality should be in two places at once, both in outer space and in a person’s mind. “Representative” theories of perception avoid the logical paradox, but on the other hand they violate the reader’s sense of life, which knows no intervening mental image but seems to see the room and the book immediately as they exist. (James 1977, 173)

The pure experience that is a part of the physical object (the book, the room) is also, at the same time, part of the mind that knows it. So James thinks that, when I am actually in the room, I perceive the room and the book themselves as they *really* exist, *not* indirectly through intermediary images or ideas. James gleefully flies in the face of the representative theory of perception, in which external objects somehow cause internal “mental” representations like sense data and what we see are these indirect representations, not the objects themselves or their proper parts. How an external object can cause a “mental representation” of an entirely different nature and how the mental representation can “represent” external objects of an entirely different nature are both completely unexplained on the traditional theory.

James also takes sensations in a realistic, but nonrepresentative, sense. A neutral bit of pure experience can be taken as real merely by taking it to be the “flat” complex of colored blobs (James 1977, 201), squiggles, and flashes that it is. Taken in itself like this, it is neither a physical object, nor is it a mental sensation. It is just exactly the neutral collection of blobs and flashes it seems to be and does not represent

any object truly or falsely because it does not intrinsically represent anything (ibid.), a point previously made by Mach in his discussion of so-called sense-illusions (Mach 1886/1959, 10), which are really just phenomena like any others. James points out, for example, that there is no difference between a real fire and a sensation of flames and light qua phenomena, except for the fact that one fire burns real sticks and the other does not. This fact does not make mental phenomena any less real when they are taken as simple natural occurrences: mental fire and real fire are on the same footing there.

In the physical order, the blobs and flashes can be causally linked with the history of an external physical object and the human nervous system, but this causal linkage does not play on any representative relation or intrinsic similarity between them. This point is made by James in his famous "Memorial Hall" example. A bunch of blobs and flashes, even if they look exactly like Memorial Hall and are shaped exactly like Memorial Hall, will not count as a *perception* of Memorial Hall unless an external causal relation can be established between the blobs and the real hall, bestowing on them their "knowing office":

Suppose me to be sitting here in my library at Cambridge, at ten minutes' walk from Memorial Hall and to be thinking truly of the latter object. My mind may have before it only the name, or it may have a clear image, or it may have a very dim image of the hall, but such intrinsic differences in the image make no difference in its cognitive function. Certain extrinsic phenomena, special experiences of conjunction, are what impart to the image, be it what it may, its knowing office.

For instance, if you ask me what hall I mean by my image and I can tell you nothing; or if I fail to point or lead you toward the Harvard Delta; or if being led by you, I am uncertain whether the hall I see be what I had in mind or not, you would rightly deny that I had "meant" that particular hall at all, even though my mental image might to some degree have resembled it. The resemblance would count in that case as coincidental merely, for all sorts of things of a kind resemble each other without being for that reason to take cognizance of each other. (James 1977, 200–201)

Timothy Sprigge (1996) points out that James was rejecting the contemporary phenomenological tradition, replacing the "inherent intentionality" of experience insisted on by the phenomenologists with purely natural causal links that may or may not hold between sensations and an external object. (See also Lamberth [1999, 78] for James's critique of intentionality and use of causal links a decade earlier.)

Of course, it would be extremely difficult to isolate raw sensations just as they appear. In everyday experience, we are constantly adding

to our sensations with our imaginations and our intellectual judgments, both consciously and unconsciously. Actual sensation is also quite fragmentary and incomplete, so that we often think we sense more than we really do. Thus, it often seems that we could point to the arrangement of blobs and the fact that they are in space and say that they at least *look* like objects or a room to us, even if they are only raw sensations. And while it is true that raw sensations do support some simple phenomenological judgments like “this blob is blue and that blob is red” or “this blue one is to the right of that red one,” like painted daubs on a canvas, these judgments fall well short of any perceptual judgment about objects, as we shall see.

What do real objects have that a mosaic of sensations cannot simulate? As we shall see in more detail below, objects in space exist from multiple perspectives, not just the single egocentric perspectives in which sensations occur. Objects have unsensed parts like a back, sides, and past and future stages, none of which is present in the monoperspective of a sensation that is all surface and all present in single moment. Sensations also lack any intentional ability to “reach out” to a perspectival system of external objects; they are simply individuals with no relations to any other individuals other than causal relations. There is just not enough in raw sensation to even call it a “perception” of an object.

#### 4. THE “DIFFERENCE-OF-KIND” THESIS, “RETROSPECTIVE,” AND “PROTENSIVE” CERTAINTY

There is one very serious flaw in what James says above about the “two-takings” theory, which must be addressed. The mere fact of the existence of the blobs and flashes as they are, neither true nor false of anything, does not contain *any* direct perceptual knowledge of an external object. So when I am taking the blobs and flashes as real in themselves, I am *not* taking them to be part of an object like Memorial Hall. But when I take them for a perception of Memorial Hall, I am assuming some further causal relation that ties the blobs and flashes to a real external building, and they become proper parts of that external object that I perceive directly. But these further external relations that make the blobs and squiggles a perception of a building are not directly perceived by me. So where James’s theory of perception is *direct*, it is not a theory of perception of *external* objects, and where it is a theory of perception of external objects, it is not direct.

Let us see if we can resolve this dilemma, starting with a phenomenological observation. James claims that, in a judgment of perception, our thoughts actually seem to “reach out” to the external objects in the room around us, a feature of perception I think everyone can at least claim to

be familiar with and also one emphasized by Thomas Reid: namely, that, no matter how many times we tell ourselves that the colors, the room, and the book are only indirect mental representations or pictures in our minds, our perceptions still do *seem* to reach out beyond our minds to the real objects in the room.

James claims that this phenomenological feature is *not* an illusion but a feature marking out an actual judgment of perception of objects that should be taken at face value. That seems absurd, for could not the same be said of a hallucination of a room? If what James says is true—that we can take the phenomenological experience at face value—he must somehow establish an internal, *introspectively knowable*, difference between the act of sensation, that is, of blobs and squiggles that do not reach out to anything, and the judgment of perception of mind-independent objects, such as books and rooms that do exhibit this phenomenology. Their internally introspected “intentional” features, in other words, should serve to distinguish the experiences of sensation and perception according to James. But, again, how can he possibly make good on this claim when, as everyone acknowledges, sensation and perception seem internally to be the same from within skeptical scenarios like a dream or hallucination?

This notion that the acts of sensation and judgments of perception are different and distinguishable internally, or introspectively, is sometimes called the “difference-of-kind” thesis. James shares this thesis with disjunctivist epistemologists such as J. M. Hinton (1967). On this view, judgments of perception and acts of sensation are internally different, have different conditions of assertability and different truth conditions. The sensation is an agglomeration of blobs, flashes, squiggles, and so forth. A perception of an object is completely different in its phenomenology. I do not see blobs and squiggles, as if painted on a canvas in daubs; I see a world of solid spatio-temporal objects to which my perceptions seem intentionally to “reach out.” Perceived objects are also very different from sensations. For example, they have sides and a back that I do not sense. They have past and future states that I must imagine adjoined to their present appearance. They exist in other spatial perspectives, in addition to my own egocentric perspective, linked together in a systematic way. This chair, appearing perspectively in a certain way to me, should appear in a different perspective to someone situated elsewhere, the way an object in space like a penny does from multiple viewpoints. A judgment of perception, thus, adds further “intellectual” truth conditions to the objects being perceived, such as the condition that there is an external object in space in front of me, only some of which is experienced directly through its proper parts that my mind shares with them and of which my egocentric perspective is only

one in a connected system of perspectives that includes the object from all vantage points. So the perception of the object and having sensations of blobs and squiggles are totally different.

But, as the skeptic insists, would not the phenomenology of the room and the objects be exactly as James describes it during a hallucination, as well as in a veridical perception of the room? Would the subject not still agree that he “sees the objects in the room exactly as they are,” and not blobs and flashes, even when all he actually sees *are* blobs and flashes? Acts of sensation may indeed *be* different from judgments of perception, and the knower may even *know* there is a difference between them; but he may not be in a position to *tell* the difference in a skeptical scenario, so what does it matter that one is really a judgment of perception and the other is not? They *seem* the same to us, and that should be all that matters to the epistemologist.

I believe this skepticism is not justified and that we do have leverage, even from within a skeptical scenario to assert naïvely that we perceive objects to which our thoughts “reach out” intentionally. The key has to do with what I will call “conditions of assertion” for making judgments. To assert a judgment of perception presupposes that you are actually *able* to assert it before it can be true or false of anything. Compare the act of speaking a sentence. You not only have to get the sequence of syllables right, but you have to know the language and the circumstances under which the sentence is used; indeed, probably a great deal more background information besides that all has to be correct before your speech can be considered a sentence and not just noise. And the same goes for perceptual judgments. Say I am having a sensation of what seems to me like my being in my room surrounded by my books and table. I may not be able to tell the difference internally between this sensation and a very realistic dream or hallucination. I have no doubt that the purely mental accompaniments of the blobs and the accompanying acts of the mind would seem to me to be exactly the same in the sensation and a true perception of the room. Now, if it turns out to be a dream, then, of course, it would not actually have been a perception at all, not even while I was having it; it would just have been a sensation of some blobs and squiggles that seemed like the room, without bearing any external connection to it and, thus, by James’s Memorial Hall argument, bearing no real resemblance to a room at all, now or then. In the sensation, the “books” had no pages, sides, or back. The sheaf of “pages” could have been just a swath of white spread out by a paintbrush, as in a Velasquez or Sargent painting, all surface. There were no other occupied perspectives on the “room” but my own egocentric viewpoint. The interior of the “room” was more like a break-away movie set with no outside and with just enough filled in to fool the camera. In a classic sense illusion



known as the Ames room (Gregory 1994), for example, a wildly oblique array of shapes and surfaces set at angles can seem to resemble a room if one looks at it from one and only one monoperspective, through a peep hole. Those are the things sensations present at their very best.

So when the dream or hallucination is revealed to me, say, by a kind of instant replay where I can go back and watch the dream again, I immediately deny that I was ever really perceiving anything, and I say that I was only sensing, hallucinating, or dreaming, instead. The phenomenology of the dream on instant replay is that of a tableau of shifting blobs and squiggles now fully recognized as such, and the phenomenology of perceptions "reaching out" to objects is not present in retrospect. So, with a little thought, I could even say that what is now perfectly clear to me on instant replay was true even before I knew the difference or knew what I was asserting or even whether I *could* assert anything. Even when we are unable to tell the difference, there still *is* a difference, a great one, between the performance of acts of sensation and judgments of perception. Just as the blobs and squiggles do not represent Memorial Hall and never did, so too the act of sensing blobs and squiggles is not a judgment of perception and never was one. I am, thus, able to achieve a kind of "retrospective" backward-looking certainty about the acts performed even under the conditions of a skeptical scenario. These conditions of uncertainty actually did not affect the acts and judgments themselves, which were always different, only my ability to tell which I was performing at the time or which I was unable to perform. The subject's thinking at the time that the acts and judgments were similar, or the same, did not, in fact, make them so. Seeming to assert a judgment is not the same thing as actually asserting one.

And with a little more thought, we find that this certainty is not just retrospective either. The informed subject knows the difference between the assertability conditions of the perceptual judgment and the act or event of sensing even under conditions of uncertainty. So I can actually *assert* a naïve judgment of perception that I perceive some kind of room with objects in it, just as James insists I can, even under those skeptical conditions. I assert that I am perceiving a room when I am because, if I am *not* in fact perceiving a room but merely some blobs and squiggles, then I know I will not say later that I *perceived* a room at all, not even falsely. There are, of course, cases of false perception where one *object* is taken for another, like mistaking a scotch bottle for a book or a garbage can for a man lurking outside the window, but this dream or hallucination is not one of them since the blobs and squiggles will not even support the assertion of a mistaken judgment. Instead, I will withdraw the assertion that I was ever in a condition to perceive any object in the first place. The conditions of assertion of the judgment

were not met under the conditions of the skeptical scenario: a perceptual judgment about objects was “asserted” before what was really just an array of blobs and squiggles.

Finally, as we approach that naïve confidence with which James asserts perceptual judgments in the quote above, we can transform our “retrospective” certainty into what I will call a forward-looking or “protensive” certainty, even from within the skeptical scenario. If I do perceive the room and the room exists, then my perception goes *straight through* to the very external objects I seem to be perceiving and in exactly the way I seem to be perceiving it, from their directly perceived proper parts filling out into an external perspectival system that includes me as an observer and fills in all of the other perspectives besides. If I am only sensing blobs and squiggles with no real ability to represent a room at all, not even an illusion of a room, then I never was in a condition to assert anything about perceiving a room in the first place. All of these facts about future states of affairs are known to me in the skeptical scenario, so I have no difficulty in projecting the judgment forward beyond the conditions of the test anticipating its eventual outcome. Therefore, I *do* have a kind of forward-looking certainty about my perceptual judgments about being in some kind of a room with objects, even if some of my particular judgments about those objects could be false. At least, I am saved from the kind of total deception skeptical scenarios offer.

But now suppose the subject turns the tables on us and asks, “*Why* am I not warranted in asserting I perceive objects if you admit that the sensation of blobs and squiggles *seemed* to me exactly like a room with books? Are these not the very same internal conditions, gazing on an array of sensations of blobs and squiggles (as you would have it) under which I always *do* assert the judgment that I perceive a room with books? I never directly perceive more than that even when I assert successful perceptual judgments.” No, James would say, for, after you are disabused by watching the instant replay, you too would say that the blobs and squiggles do not even “seem” to resemble a room with books and that your sensory act does not even “seem” remotely similar to a judgment of perception. His answer: “But how then can I assert the perception of objects with such naïve confidence if I don’t know if I am capable of assertion or not.” I believe James would answer that, on the contrary, you can *only* naively assert this judgment “I am in some kind of room with books,” just as it seems to you, since, if the room does turn out to be just a collection of blobs and squiggles, you have not actually asserted anything. There is no other option *but* to assert a judgment of perception of a room with objects, of some sort anyway, when it seems to you to be so, and that is what you should do in all cases. This would

back up James's taking the phenomenology of the room with objects *always* at face value, as he says above.

But what if it is not incoherent to carry out judgments of perception while looking at an array of what turn out later to be blobs and squiggles in a dream or hallucination? The assertions are well made, but they simply come out false. My answer is that there are indeed cases where one perceives falsely, where perceived objects A are mistaken for other objects B. The same judgments that lead us to correct perception also lead to false perceptions. For example, a garbage can is mistaken for a man outside the window. But an *object* is perceived in both cases, one truly and another falsely. The judgment that the object is a man is actually assertable of a garbage can too, but false. The judgment is false because some *other* object is actually perceived, not because *all* of the objects dissolve into the blobs and squiggles of a hallucination and nothing is perceived because no perceptual judgment was ever asserted. These extreme cases of *total* delusion, which are the ones under discussion here, are where we must challenge the idea that the subject could have made any coherent assertion to perceive any object whatever.

Take the case of having a dream where you think you are speaking French and pulling it off with panache. But you do not really know French, so the syllables you utter only seem to you to make up a French sentence with the meaning "Voltaire was Molière's brother." You might wake up and realize this is a false assertion, when you correctly phrase an English sentence, expressing a proposition that *can* be true or false, but did you succeed in making the assertion *then* by uttering a random string of syllables and calling it a French sentence expressing the proposition that Voltaire was Molière's brother? No, it never happened, no matter what you believed at the time. This so called "assertion" of a proposition was not anything beyond an agglomeration of syllables and a feeling that one was making sensible assertions. (This strange and uncomfortable sensation of mouthing "mere syllables and accompanying feelings" sometimes comes over me unbidden when I am giving a public lecture, when it is most unwelcome!) The feelings and sensations certainly exist in themselves and are neither true nor false; they should be taken in the direct sense as exactly the strings of syllables and feelings they seem to be.

These sorts of arguments, associated with Putnam (1981) and the later Ludwig Wittgenstein, have their ultimate historico-conceptual roots in James's Memorial Hall example, but they are better developed in the way I am suggesting, first to establish a "retrospective" certainty and then a "protensive" certainty from within the skeptical scenario. Putnam recognizes some kind of retrospective certainty about hallucinations as a possible reading of James (Putnam 1990, 248–49) but rejects it since he thinks it makes James an antirealist about past experience;

that is, Putnam seems to think the perceiver who has hallucinated later has to say that he never experienced *anything*, when clearly he did at least experience the blobs and squiggles of his sensation. But James is only saying that experiences that retrospectively do not measure up as perceptions are still sensed exactly as they are in themselves without representing a perception of an *object* such as a dagger or Memorial Hall, not that the sensations never happened. Also, according to Putnam, James never refuted the skeptic (*ibid.*, 246) but simply held up direct realism as a viable alternative to the “sense data” theory that we never perceive external objects directly (*ibid.*, 251). James may not argue in the traditional way against the Cartesian skeptic, but he still shows us much more than just an “alternative to sense data.”

To sum up the position we have reached so far, James’s quote above, about taking the room and its objects to be directly real perceptions of those external objects “as they exist” now makes more sense, where it seemed hopelessly naïve before. On the Jamesian view, the perceptual judgment that I perceive real external objects in space is always asserted *full strength*, or it is not asserted at all. Thus, when I do perceive, my thoughts go straight through without intermediary to the external physical objects they seem to be about and of which my sensations (colors and all) are concrete proper parts. Even false judgments presume some general conditions like this, even if we take some objects for others.

Putting it all together:

1. Either I am in some kind of real room with objects arranged around me, or I am before an array of my own sensations of blobs and squiggles that do not even resemble any room with objects.
2. If I assert the judgment that “I am perceiving some kind of room with some objects around me” and I am really before an internal array of blobs and squiggles, then I will never have succeeded in asserting a judgment to perceive anything.
3. If I assert the judgment that “I am perceiving some kind of room with objects around me” and I am really in a room with objects around me, then I will have succeeded in making the assertion, and the assertion will have been true at least of some general sorts of objects. It may be false of specific objects.
4. I know (1, 2, 3) under the conditions of a skeptical scenario.
5. I know I can always correctly assert, with forward-looking certainty, the naïve judgment that “I am in some kind of a room with real objects around me” when I am having that experience, and I can do so even *before* the truth is revealed to me.

## 5. INTELLECTUAL CONDITIONS OF PERCEPTION

The remaining problem with the “no-common-kind” thesis is that we are owed some kind of explanation why the acts of sensation and judgments of perception still *seem* the same in skeptical scenarios if they are really so totally different in kind that no one would take one for the other when shown the instant replay. Acts of sensation and judgments of perception have to be absolutely indistinguishable in skeptical scenarios and yet retrospectively recognizable as *completely different in kind*, but how can this be? Certainly, the purely sensory components of both acts are completely the same: they both consist of blobs and squiggles, and there is no internal way to tell apart the blobs and squiggles of a sensation or hallucination from the directly perceived proper parts of external objects in a perception. But there always is a difference, and there will have been a difference between acts and judgments we perform even under conditions of uncertainty. So, since perceptions and sensations *are* internally different acts and since the difference clearly does not consist in their having any different sensory contents, it must consist in something else: namely, the intellectual contents of a perceptual judgment. It is, therefore, true what the disjunctivists and Jamesians assert about the difference in kind; but, to make a Kantian point, to be explained below, it is rather thought and understanding that contribute this difference to the perceptual judgment that is not contained in the mere act of sensing. Thus, for example, on replaying the dream in instant replay, we consciously withhold these intellectual features of perceptual judgment, so the phenomenological feature of perceptions “reaching out to objects” disappears, replaced by the nonintentional sensation of a flat tableau of shifting blobs and squiggles. Since we have already assumed that there is no “inherent intentionality” to sensory contents, the phenomenon James refers to, of experiencing perceptions that actually “reach out” to external objects, is effected purely by the intellectual contents of the judgment of perception, which we must now investigate.

I have been suggesting that a perceptual judgment like “I am in some sort of room with objects” has the following preconditions: my egocentric experience of “walking around a room viewing various objects” from my own monoperspectival point of view cannot be all there is. There must be, at a minimum, an occupied system of perspectives surrounding these objects and me, which includes my own monoperspective as one, but most of which I am *not* able to observe from my monoperspective, a system that fills in all of the possible points of view on the room from those other perspectives. In those other perspectives, chairs and books will have backs and sides unseen by me and a history in time beyond the present, a temporal perspective in other words. The room will not

be some Ames room or break-away movie set with just enough walls and furniture to fool the viewer and nothing besides. A town seen out the window will not be a Potemkin village with fake storefronts and cut-out windows with false interiors and simulated cardboard figures walking back and forth. In a perception, the room and its objects will exist from *every* perspectival point in it, which they clearly do not in these nightmarish monoperspectives. In fact, it is literally impossible for any given experience of objects to a subject internally to represent this entire sum of circumambient perspectives because no one can occupy more than one egocentric point of view at once. These missing perspectives occupied by objects must, therefore, be filled in by the intellect and the imagination in addition to any of the sensory contents of the perception on the side of the judgment, but they must also be *really* occupied by objects on the side of the external environment as well. Thus, for my judgment of perception to even be assertable, I must be surrounded by a perspectival system of objects of which my monoperspective is one and where any perspective can serve as a vantage point from which to represent all of the others.<sup>1</sup> These assertability conditions are known to me internally, of course; thus, I can argue, as above, that, if I do turn out to occupy a monoperspective that is all surface with no other occupied perspectives, I will say that a judgment of perception was not asserted under those circumstances and withdraw it, no matter how realistic it might have seemed to me at the time. Consider, for example, a realistic-seeming dream in which one is chased by a dog. It certainly seems real enough, but we lack any occupied vantage point for the dog and the other objects in the dream. What we are really saying in reporting the dream is that *we felt pursued*, from our monoperspective, not that anything pursued us.

Also to be eliminated from consideration are situations involving “deviant” causal chains to external objects that are not even possibly perspectival relations between a perceiving subject and his perceived objects. The system of perspectives must include the subject’s immanent, internal viewpoint as one such perspective within it, and it must be a systematic and connected continuation of the subject’s internal perspective outward. It cannot be replaced by some *other* set of perspectives of objects of which he is not directly aware, nor can he be in contact with them in some indirect, nonstandard, nonperspectival way that he himself would not assert when he talks about “these objects he perceives with his eyes as being five feet in front of him.” If, for example, an evil scientist wires up the subject’s brain to a simulation but takes care to connect the sensations of the simulation via deviant causal connections to *other* external objects in a secret room, in *another* system of perspectives that exactly duplicates those of the simulation, the subject still cannot assert

any perceptual relation to *these* objects. *His* own occupied perspectives are empty; thus, he occupies a monoperspective just as before. A clever philosopher in this situation might try to assert that a scientist is connecting his perception of a room to *another* perspectival system of objects in *another* room and assert guesses about *those* objects and the scientist's occupied perspective, too. But these missing perspectives on the *perceived* room are still not occupied; some *other* system of objects, around some *other* room, is occupied, and the missing perspectives on the *actually perceived* room remain empty. The philosopher can think whatever he wishes, and he may even guess correctly, but he must give up the idea that he *perceives* the room in front of him. Perception is still, for all its intellectual preconditions, a sensory matter of being in direct contact with objects and their proper parts in a way that is projected outward from the perceiver's own perspective in the way he intends it, not through indirect or merely representative contact through *any* imaginable links someone else might think up. If I am not linked to the object in the way I perceive myself to be linked to it, then it is not really a perception at all.

## 6. OTHER PERSPECTIVAL SYSTEMS: KANTIAN "EMPIRICAL REALISM"

There are limits, however. What this argument does not show is what *sort* of perspectival system of objects surrounds the observer when he makes these perceptual judgments. What are the intellectual conditions for a valid perspectival system continuing a subject's own perspective and perceptions outward to an environment of objects? Space and time certainly satisfy the intellectual requirements of a perspectival system. Any point within space can be the origin of coordinates for representing any other point elsewhere *in the same space*; any point in time can serve to represent any other point within the same time line as a past, present, or future point in temporal perspective.

To introduce a key Kantian observation, this objective intellectual "skeleton" of a subject-object perspectival system undergirds the sensory and imagined space-time form of our perceptions, as Kant declares at several key points in the transcendental deduction, particularly in the B-edition (but see also Kant 1787/1998, A 107–9). In brief, the argument is something like this: Kant declares that the "synthetic unity of apperception" is the highest principle guiding the understanding in the construction of experience, higher even than the categories, for it is the synthetic unity that ultimately justifies the categories' application to any possible experience (this is what transcendental "deduction" means). The synthetic unity takes all intuitions and sensations delivered by

sensibility as a disordered bundle of “snapshots,” if you will, and unifies them under the principle that they are one and all experiences of objects to a subject.<sup>2</sup> When I walk around a house taking in the different sides in a certain order, this ordering of the snapshots is determined by the series of vantage points taken up by a subject (with his own ordered inner states in time) to an object in a distinct sequence of perspectival views of the house. If these experiences were presented in a series of disordered photos of the house lying in a heap, it would still be possible to reconstruct the objective series via the categories under the overall heuristic principle that they must present an ordered series of perspectival views of the object to an observing subject.

In the B-deduction (B 151–52), Kant distinguishes between an “intellectual synthesis” of experience, carried out by the categories and the synthetic unity, and applicable to other forms of sensibility besides ours, and a “figurative synthesis” carried out by the imagination and sensibility under the direction of the understanding. For Kant, the construction of the underlying perspectival system of vantage points of subjects and objects, the “intellectual synthesis” of the understanding, is what is really objective about spatio-temporal representation, not the schematized space-time form contributed by sensibility and the imagination, which depends on the former for its objectivity. This intellectual synthesis of a system of perspectives would apply even where the intuitions of space and time were replaced by other forms of intuition or sensibility, and, when they are present, it is the intellectual synthesis again that explains why synthesized constructions in space and time, like drawing a line or synthesizing a certain number, are objective, as in math and physics, and are not just constructions of the human imagination, for example, where we adjoin images of previous and future stages of the construction to a presently sensed stage in drawing out an object like a house in stages or a motion in intuition like the parabola of a falling body.

As proof of the primacy of the synthetic unity under the categories, Kant points out that even the infinite manifolds of space and time can themselves be represented as “objects” to an observing self (B 159–61), indicating that the synthetic unity of apperception is an even more all-encompassing unity of the understanding than that provided by sensibility and intuition. Kant also shows in two examples (B 151–52) that the understanding actually directs the sensibility and the imagination in the construction of objects, in taking in the sides of a house and watching water freeze. He says we can “abstract from” the spatial and temporal form of these experiences and consider ordering the states intellectually, with the categories and the synthetic unity of apperception operating on receptive sensory and intuitive content of whatever



nature. The intellectual synthesis of ordered perspectival views of objects to a subject would apply even if the sensory spatio-temporal form of the experience were different, perhaps for other thinking beings with differently constructed sensibilities.

In fact, there are many ways to consider constructing representation systems that have the same intellectual "hard core" of a perspectival system of objects to a subject, not just spatio-temporal ones. Gottfried Leibniz's system of unextended monads is an example of which Kant was particularly aware, and we can readily think of others. Consider construing objects as constructions out of elementary "point-events" ordered spatio-temporally in one arrangement, but which can also be ordered in a variety of other arrangements that are not necessarily spatio-temporal, for example, in abstract quality or property "spaces" that still retain a perspectival structure (see Banks 2013). These other possible systems will also have to count as possible candidate environments for my perception. We perceive objects intellectually, objects that we "reach out to" through perceptual judgments, and not through our sensations alone. Those judgments have a firmer intellectual "hard core" of assertability and truth conditions that the external world can satisfy many different ways. Even though we directly perceive the proper parts of mind-independent objects, then, we cannot be said to perceive more than their overall intellectual structure in an external perspectival system in their relation to us.

To sum up this Kantian line of argument, we perceive empirically real objects *directly* but not *uniquely*; only the intellectual content of our perceptual judgments represents the external objects our perceptions are about. In the sense that spatio-temporal objects are one such way to satisfy these conditions, then I do indeed *directly perceive* an environment of spatio-temporal objects around me in a room and sense their proper parts directly. But other rational beings could reinterpret my spatio-temporal perceptions and objects in terms of their own empirical representation system, and we would both be equally right in our direct perceptions of those objects. This idea that we perceive spatio-temporal objects directly, but not uniquely, is what I believe Kant meant by calling space and time "empirically real" but also "transcendentally ideal," since spatio-temporal representation of objects cannot be applied beyond human sensibility but the intellectual preconditions of spatio-temporal representation actually can. Spatio-temporal objects in perspectives always serve us as an objective empirical representation, as in physics, but this representation is only *one valid way* to represent many possible intellectual systems of perspectives of which space and time are only one. Other rational beings would agree on these intellectual conditions of a perceptual judgment but not on its sensory spatio-temporal form.

We, however, do perceive objects using this form, and we *are* justified in taking this admittedly subjective form of representation of external objects in a completely realistic and direct sense, just as long as we stick to the hard-core intellectual features of our own representation. Is this antirealism? I think not. Our scientific theories can involve realistic spatio-temporal models and mechanisms of natural events and processes continuous with our own form of spatio-temporal perception, and we can even think of these models in a realistic sense as long as we do not thereby limit ourselves *only* to this form of representation or attribute what may only be sensory or visual aspects of the models and mechanisms to reality *an sich*. Barring that, we are free to pursue whatever models and analogies we wish.

Is there also an historical connection between James's direct realism and Kant's empirical realism? Like Kant, who struggled to explain to literal-minded readers how he could be empirically realistic about spatio-temporal objects yet insist that objects need not be spatio-temporal in themselves, James too was at pains to explain how he could be pluralistic *and* direct in his realism all at the same time. In an oft-quoted letter to Dickinson S. Miller, dated August 5, 1907, James gives a homely example of beans to illustrate this. One perceiver classifies the beans by weight, another by color or size. All have legitimate and empirically real systems of classification determined by the subject's system of representation of the world and interests; they may all be direct and real, but no single classification has a unique monopoly on the one true system of beans *an sich*, nor do they even really disagree. James was teaching Kant before he began the radical empiricist essays, from 1897–99, although his remarks are dismissive (James 1975; Carlson 1996, 363–64). As Carlson points out (364), James was irked by colleagues who remarked on his similarities with Kant. James and Kant do differ on many points (see Myers 1986), but at least their forms of realism share a deep affinity.

## 7. EPILOGUE: AGAINST REPRESENTATIONAL THEORIES

One consequence of the view presented here is that mental representations so called are *never* complete in themselves if they are going to represent external objects. If we take them in the completed sense, in themselves, we are left with nonrepresentative blobs and squiggles or monoperspectival dreamscapes that do not represent anything. If an experience is going to represent anything, it must be *incomplete*, needing to be filled in, for example, by the intellectual contents of a judgment that makes the experience intentionally “reach out” to external objects, as James rightly says; but these objects cannot entirely appear *in* experience, else the experience would *already* be complete, lacking

nothing, and would not “reach out” to anything. The lesson to draw is this: mental phenomena must be *incomplete* fragments of an unseen whole in order to intentionally represent anything. They cannot be an already internally complete internal simulacrum of the world à la René Descartes, for, if mental representations are complete, they represent nothing beyond themselves and have no “intrinsic” intentionality. And if they do “intentionally” represent external objects, then they are *not* complete, and the needed but missing objects and perspectives must be provided by an intellectual judgment of perception.

Descartes thought a picture, which is a completed representation or arrangement of objects, always required something *else* for it to be a picture of, but this view is wrong for two reasons. One, the picture is a completely existing thing that requires nothing else to complete it; it has its own complete “formal reality,” as Descartes himself says. But when your representation has all the structure or “formal reality” the object has, why does it need the object? What would the object add to the already completed picture? Two, the external reality that supposedly *does* complete the picture is no more “formally” complete than the picture was originally. We can add a real arrangement of real buildings and real sailboats around a bay to the painted ones in a picture, but each is a completed thing on its own that does not intrinsically represent anything. Adding the external reality to the picture merely adds a picture to a picture. Neither arrangement *lacks* anything for which it needs the other. If they are not causally related, then why should they be related to each other at all? Isomorphism of structure does not, in any way, demand a further representative relation between those structures. This was James’s original point about Memorial Hall: let it have as perfect a similarity to the hall as you like, but without an external causal relation, there is nothing to paste them together and certainly no magical “representative” relations to suggest one is related to the other, a relation that may be accidental or arbitrary after all (see also Putnam 1981 for his effective critique of “magical” theories of reference and ensuing skeptical consequences for model theory in logic). James’s Memorial Hall argument is a powerful blow not only against theories of mental representation but also against any theories of representation that work by mere similarity or isomorphism of structure.

As an afterthought, take it for what you will, I think our having essentially “incomplete” mental representations, needing to be completed by intellectual judgments about their real external relations to mind-independent objects, makes a great deal of evolutionary sense, especially as a space saver in our skulls. Why duplicate effort modeling the whole world in a simulacrum mind with its own complete internal

world representation? Why not just sketch in some incomplete fragments, model only as much of an “interface mind” as it takes to perceive directly limited bits of the world, and project intentional judgments that reach out transcendently beyond these bits, letting the world fill in the rest?

*Wright State University*

## NOTES

1. See Friedman (2012) for an exegesis of this “perspectival principle” and the role it plays for Kant. See also Brewer (2002) for the view that this “perspectival” content of space and time is directly perceived.

2. The principle is metaphysical, not psychological. *Any* reality is capable of subject-object representation by taking up a standpoint within it and representing the rest from that vantage point, with all other internal standpoints equally valid.

## REFERENCES

- Banks, Erik C. 2003. *Ernst Mach's World Elements: A Study in Natural Philosophy*. Dordrecht: Kluwer.
- . 2013. “Extension and Measurement: A Constructivist Program from Leibniz to Grassmann.” *Studies in History and Philosophy of Science* 44, no. 1: 20–31.
- Brewer, Bill. 2002. *Perception and Reason*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Carlson, Thomas. 1996. “James and the Kantian Tradition.” In Putnam, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to William James*, 363–83.
- Cooper, Wesley. 2002. *The Unity of William James' Thought*. Nashville, TN: Vanderbilt University Press.
- Friedman, Michael. 2012. “Kant on Geometry and Spatial Intuition.” *Synthese* 186, no. 1: 231–55.
- Gale, Richard. 1999. *The Divided Self of William James*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Gregory, Richard L. 1994. *Even Odder Perceptions*. New York: Routledge.
- Hinton, J. M. 1967. “Visual Experiences.” *Mind* 76, no. 302: 217–27.

- James, William. 1975. *Manuscript Essays and Notes: The Works of William James*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- . 1977. *The Writings of William James*. Edited by J. J. McDermott. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Kant, Immanuel. 1787/1998. *Kritik der reinen Vernunft*. Hamburg: Felix Meiner Verlag.
- Lamberth, David C. 1999. *William James and the Metaphysics of Experience*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Mach, Ernst. 1886/1959. *The Analysis of Sensations*. Translated by Sydney Waterlow and C. M. Williams. New York: Dover.
- Myers, Gerald E. 1986. *William James: His Life and Thought*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.
- Putnam, Hilary. 1978. "The Meaning of 'Meaning.'" *Philosophical Papers*. Vol 2. *Mind Language and Reality*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- . 1981. *Reason, Truth and History*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- . 1990. "James' Theory of Perception." In *Realism With a Human Face*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- . 1994. "Sense, Nonsense and the Senses: An Inquiry into the Powers of the Human Mind." *Journal of Philosophy* 91, no. 9: 445–517.
- Putnam, Ruth Anna, ed. 1997. *The Cambridge Companion to William James*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Sprigge, T.L.S. 1996. "James, Aboutness and his British Critics." In Putnam, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to William James*, 125–44.
- Thiele, Joachim. 1978. *Wissenschaftliche Kommunikation: Die Korrespondenz Ernst Machs*. Kastellaun: Henn Verlag.

2