

## Perception<sup>1</sup>

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### 1. Introduction

Perception is one of the distinctive and central ways in which we come to know about physical objects in our surroundings, and about their properties. At the moment, I know that there is a yellow banana on the desk before me. How do I know that? Well, I can see the banana, see its color, and thereby see, and so know, that there is a yellow banana on the desk. Similarly, I know that a car just parked outside on the driveway. How do I know that? By hearing the car, hearing it stopping and thereby hearing that there is a car outside.

Perception in the sense at issue is *sensory* perception. I come to know about physical objects in my surroundings by perception when I come to know about them via one of the traditional senses: sight, hearing, touch, taste and smell. But the concept of perception, at least as used by English speakers, is much wider in its application than this. For one thing, it is perfectly legitimate to say that one *sees* the force of an argument, but one doesn't mean by this that one *visually* sees it. (Perhaps all that is meant is that one knows that the argument has force.) Likewise, one might say that one knows that one's arms are folded by bodily perception (sometimes called 'proprioception') or that one knows that one is upright by the sense of balance. But, while both of these involve processes importantly analogous to sensory perception, they do not involve the traditional senses. There are various questions that arise when we ask to what extent phenomena like proprioception, or seeing the force of an argument, are similar to and different from sensory perception. For our purposes here, however, we can afford to set these further cases or alleged cases of perception aside, and concentrate on the sensory, and in fact primarily the visual, case.

Is sensory perception the *only* way in which I come to know about physical objects in our surroundings? Certainly I could have come to know that there is a yellow banana on my desk without actually seeing the banana. Somebody I trust might have told me that there is a banana on my desk. In that case, I would have come to know that there is a banana not by sight but by testimony. On the other hand, there is clearly a sense in which testimony itself relies on perception too. In order that I learn from someone else that there is a banana on the desk, I needn't have seen the banana, but I must at least have heard what was said, and this too is form of perception. However, the nature of testimony, and its relation to perception, is major philosophical topic in its own right, and one we will set aside here.

### 2. What is the Philosophy of Perception?

Perception—from now on we can take it as understood that we have sensory perception in mind—can be and has been discussed from any number of different intellectual points of view. Neuroscientists and cognitive scientists are concerned with what goes on in someone's brain or mind when they perceive. Medical researchers are interested in various sorts of diseases or degradations of the perceptual systems. Cognitive anthropologists are interested in the ways in which the concept or

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<sup>1</sup> Bibliographical footnote: the literature on the philosophy of perception is huge. Rather than aim for comprehensiveness, I have tried here to keep bibliographical references to a minimum. Starred items in the list of references are my recommendations about where to go next.

concepts of perception are articulated differently in different cultures.

In the branch of philosophy known as “philosophy of perception” the concern has been different. One strand of discussion here—a strand that dominated discussion in the 1950s and 1960s—is concerned mainly with the traditional epistemological problem of the external world, the problem of, in what sense, and to what extent, we are justified in making knowledge claims about the external world, i.e. the world of physical objects independent of the mind (Cf. e.g. Ayer 1956). Another strand, one which came to prominence in the 1970s, concerns the logical form of perceptual reports—sentences of the form ‘S sees o’, or ‘S sees that o is F (Cf. e.g. Jackson 1977). In all of these cases, however, one might discern a central question lurking in the background. That question is: what is perception such that it plays the epistemological role that it does? It is this question has been central to the recent debate about perception and it is this that will be our focus here.

Perhaps the first thing to say about the question ‘What is perception such that it plays the epistemological role that it does?’ is that it is not very easy to interpret. For example, one might think the sciences of perception are best placed to tell us what perception is. Aren’t they therefore best placed to tell us what perception is such that it plays its epistemological role? If so, what is left for philosophy to say about the nature of perception?

One answer to this question denies that the sciences are the best placed to tell us what perception is. Presumably scientists themselves rely on perception. Scientists test their hypotheses using observational or perceptual data, and conduct experiments designed to yield such information. This suggests that they could not tell us what perception is except by using perception. And this looks suspiciously circular, and in consequence seems to undermine the idea that scientific theories could tell us about perception.

This line of thought is suggestive but difficult to sustain. In the first place, it is not clear why it is objectionable to rely on perception to explain perception. After all, neuroscientists presumably rely on their brains to explain some aspect of the brain. And it is surely impossible to explain logic without relying on logic. We do not regard these facts as undermining either the project of explaining the brain or logic; why could not something similar be true in the case of perception? In the second place, implicit in this line of thought is the idea that philosophy represents a form of enquiry that is quite different from science. But is that really true? For one thing, the use of logic and conceptual analysis are as much a part of science as of philosophy. For another, philosophers seem to both advance and presuppose empirical claims somewhat as scientists do, even if those claims tend to be more abstract than the average claim made by scientists.

### **3. The Argument from Hallucination and the Sense-Data Theory.**

Instead of trying to identify a kind of enquiry, the philosophy of perception, which is somehow distinct from any science of perception, a better way to understand our question ‘what is perception such that it plays our epistemological role it does’ is to consider what is perhaps the most famous line of reasoning in philosophy of perception, the so-called ‘argument from hallucination’. This argument begins from a consideration of two possibilities, so what we need first is to have those possibilities squarely before us.

The first, which we may call ‘case 1,’ is the case I described earlier, in which I know that there is a yellow banana on the desk in front of me by seeing it. To fill out

this case, we might add that, in the envisioned circumstances, I am in good light, I am well fed and rested, I have not taken any drugs, and in general my cognitive faculties are functioning as well can be expected. Such a case, in other words, is in every way a normal case of perception in which I come to know something by sight.

The second possibility—we will call it ‘case 2’—is very much *not* a normal case of perception. In this case, there is no banana, I don’t see a banana, and I don’t know that there is a banana—if there isn’t one, you can’t know that that there is. Rather, in case 2, I *seem* to see a banana, and *seem* to know that there is one. To fill out this case, you might imagine that, far from sitting in front of my desk, I am in fact lying in a hospital bed in a fever and because of this I hallucinate that I am in front of my desk seeing a banana. The intuitive idea is that, while case 1 and case 2 are quite different—one involves a desk, the other a bed—nevertheless they seem to me to be the same. They are, in an intuitive sense, indistinguishable from my point of view.

I have described case 2 as a case of hallucination, and it is because of this that the argument from hallucination is so called. However, it is important to distinguish the case of hallucination from a different case which philosophers usually call the case of illusion. What marks case 2 as a case of hallucination is that here there is no banana at all, and so (of course) no banana that is yellow. But suppose, to vary the example, there *is* a banana and I do see it, but that I somehow misperceive its color. Perhaps, for example, I have been fitted with lenses that make yellow bananas look to have the color of grass. In that case, I would not be suffering from an hallucination but from an illusion. An argument from illusion can be constructed that is similar in structure to the argument from hallucination I am going to concentrate on. As an aid to comprehension, it might be helpful in what follows to keep in mind the distinction between hallucination and illusion, and to ask yourself whether the same points go through in the two cases.

Now the mere existence of case 1 and case 2 is not controversial, or at least ought not to be. But the argument from hallucination (‘AH’), which as I said is a piece of reasoning that begins from reflection on these cases, is controversial or anyway leads to a highly controversial conclusion. What is that argument?

The first premise of AH is that, *in case 2, I perceive something*. The rationale behind this premise can be brought out in various ways. Some might think it just obvious that, even though I am hallucinating in case 2, nevertheless I perceive something. Others might argue that, since it is clear that there is something that I perceive in case 1, and since case 2 is in an important sense indiscernible from case 1, there is something that I perceive in case 2.

The second premise of AH is that, *if I perceive something in case 2, I perceive something mental in case 2*. The rationale behind this premise can likewise be brought out in various ways. For example, it might be pointed out that there is no good physical candidate for the thing that I perceive in case 2, and, given that mental and physical are often taken as opposites, that this makes it very plausible that it is a mental thing that I perceive in this case. Others might take it as obvious in case 2 that I perceive a mental thing.

The third premise of AH is that, *if I perceive something mental in case 2, I perceive something mental in case 1*. The rationale behind this premise is that case 1 and case 2 are indistinguishable from my point of view. If they are indistinguishable from my point of view, then there is no reason for me to say that case 2 is in any different from case 1. But then if something happens in case 2—for example, that I perceive something mental—it likewise happens in case 1.

The conclusion of the argument is that in case 1 I perceive something mental. Moreover, since case 1 is exemplary—that is, it is simply a stand in for any case of perception—this conclusion generalizes to perception as such. In other words, the conclusion of the argument provides one answer to our question, ‘What is perception such that it plays the epistemological role that it does?’ According to this answer, perception is a process whereby what I directly see is something mental, and moreover this is true both in cases of veridical perception and in cases of hallucination.

The answer to our question that we have just arrived at—that perception, even in hallucinatory cases, is a process whereby I directly see something mental—is a version of what is called in the philosophical literature the ‘sense data theory’. The proponent of the sense data theory is not suggesting that one never perceives physical objects, like bananas. Rather, perceiving a banana is according to this theory a complicated process. I perceive a banana *by* seeing something mental, e.g. a mental banana. To put the point differently, according to the sense data theory, I never see physical objects *directly*. Instead I see something else, and only in virtue of that do I see physical objects. One might think that in a sense this is obviously true; isn’t it true that I see the surface of the banana and only because of that see the banana? However, while there is a sense in which this is true, it doesn’t affect the sense-data theory. For the surface of a physical object is itself a physical object of a kind. Hence, even if I perceive a physical object by perceiving its surface, I perceive the surface of a physical object by perceiving something mental, or so anyway says the sense data theory.

#### 4. Adverbialism and Meinongianism

How plausible is the sense data theory and the argument for it? It is fair to say that, while of course there are exceptions (e.g. Robinson 2001), the consensus view among recent philosophers of perception is that the sense data theory is false. There are various reasons for the consensus. Some argue that the theory is false to the way perception appears to us introspection. Some argue that it leads to skepticism. Some argue that it is inconsistent with materialism. And some argue that it is incoherent given that mental items are not the sorts of thing that one can see.

There are a lot of philosophical considerations lying behind each of these points. We will not be able to go into them in detail. Instead, let us agree provisionally with the majority that the sense data theory is false. It immediately follows that the argument *for* the sense data theory—viz., the argument from hallucination—is unsound, and so it must contain a mistake somewhere; but where exactly? At this point the consensus breaks down. While there is consensus *that* the argument from hallucination is mistaken, there is no consensus on *how* exactly it goes wrong.

One traditional proposal about how the argument goes wrong is called ‘adverbialism.’ If we take the surface grammar of claims like ‘I perceive a banana’ as our guide we would think that, when such claims are true, a relation obtains between me, on the one hand, and the banana that I see, on the other. For the adverbialist, however, surface grammar is in this case misleading. Sentences like this should be interpreted, not as expressing a relation between me and something *else*, but rather as saying something about me considered in abstraction from my surroundings. Adverbialists put this point by saying that the sentence ‘I perceive a banana’ should not be interpreted as having a structure like ‘I own a banana’—which really does

express a relation between a banana and me—but rather as having a structure something like ‘I perceive banana-ish-ly’. More generally, the adverbialist holds that any true perceptual report is made true, not by a relational fact but by a non-relational fact. Perception is simply a ‘modification of the subject’ as it was sometimes put; that is, it does not involve a relation between perceivers and their environment but rather involves something about perceivers considered in abstraction from their environment. When it is true that I perceive a banana, on this view, it is not the case that a relation obtains between me and something else, all that happens is that I have a certain sort of property.

But how does the adverbialist respond to AH? Well, the adverbialist will not deny that in case 2, I perceive something. Given the adverbialist account of what the sentence ‘I perceive a banana’ means, that sentence will be true in case 2 because in that case I do indeed have the property of perceiving banana-ish-ly. So there is no problem with premise 1 of the argument, when the relevant claim is interpreted as the adverbialist insists. Nor does the adverbialist object to premise 3, the claim that *if* I see something mental in case 2 I see something mental in case 1. That premise is conditional, and there is nothing in adverbialism to contradict it. What the adverbialist *does* object to, however, is the antecedent of the conditional; equivalently, what the adverbialist objects to in AH is premise 2. Premise 2 says that in case 2, I see something mental. But to see something mental in the relevant sense means to stand in a relation to a particular object, and the adverbialist thinks that in no case of perception do you stand in a relation to anything, mental or not. All that is true is that you perceive in a certain way. In consequence, it is not the case that in case 2, I perceive *something*; all that is true is that I perceive in a certain way.

Adverbialism was a very popular proposal at one time, but most contemporary philosophers reject it. One problem derives from what is often called the transparency or diaphanousness of perception. According to this idea, which is originally due to G.E. Moore (1922), when I reflect on my perceiving the banana, I find myself focusing on a particular object, viz., the banana. This suggests rather strongly that there is a relational structure to perception, contrary to adverbialism. If Moore’s observation is correct, it is hard to avoid the conclusion that in perceiving something I do indeed stand in a relation to a banana. Hence if it is really true in case 2 that I perceive something, then it will be true that I stand in a relation to something.

Another problem for the adverbialist has come to be called the ‘many properties problem’ (Cf. Jackson 1977). Suppose that on a particular occasion I see a red round thing and a blue square thing. The adverbialist might analyze this situation by saying that I sense red-ly and round-ly and blue-ly and square-ly. But suppose now that on a different occasion I see a blue round thing and a red square thing. How is the adverbialist to analyze that? One the face of it, they only thing they have available to say is, again, that I sense red-ly and round-ly and blue-ly and square-ly. But that does not distinguish the two experiences I just described: seeing a red round thing and a square blue thing is different from seeing a blue round thing and a red square thing. So the problem for adverbialism is that it fails to draw distinctions between experiences that are different.

Adverbialism is one traditional proposal about where the argument from hallucination goes wrong. A very different proposal begins from the idea that what is going on in AH is related to one of the traditional puzzles of philosophy, the puzzle of negative existentials. To illustrate the puzzle, suppose I say, referring to the Loch Ness Monster, ‘Nessie does not exist.’ Claims of this sort—negative existentials, as

they are called—are surprisingly difficult to interpret. In general, if a statement of the form ‘*a* is not *F*’ is true then a particular existing thing, *a*, would lack the property of being *F*; for example, if ‘Socrates is not bald’ is true, then a particular thing, Socrates, would lack the property of baldness. If we apply this to the case at hand, the statement ‘Nessie does not exist’ is true just in case a particular existing thing, Nessie, lacks the property of existence. But this in turn implies that Nessie exists! So the negative existential statement apparently has the paradoxical property that if it is true it is false. But if so, how can I truly say—as surely I can—that Nessie does not exist?

One solution to this problem relies on an idea often attributed to the 19<sup>th</sup> century German philosopher, Alexis Meinong. (Whether the idea is in fact Meinong’s need not concern us here.) According to this idea, it is possible to draw a distinction between two modes or ways of being, which are often called ‘subsistence’ and ‘existence.’ Loch Ness (the lake) exists, but the Loch Ness Monster, Nessie, does not. Nevertheless both subsist, and moreover, for the sentence ‘Nessie does not exist’ to be meaningful, all that is required is that Nessie subsists (i.e. it is not required that she exists). This idea raises a number of questions; but for us what is important is its connection to AH. What is this connection? Well, the first premise of the argument is that, in case 2, I perceive something. But, the proponent of the Meinong-inspired View says, this is ambiguous between subsistence and existence. Is what is being claimed that I see something that *exists* or merely that I see something that *subsists*? To the extent that the distinction is available to us, it is tempting to say that in case 2 the banana does not exist but only subsists. But then it would not follow that in premise 2, the thing that exists is mental. For the reason for saying that it is mental is only that there is nothing physical that exists which could be the thing that I perceive.

This Meinong-inspired response is different from the sense data theory. Instead of saying that, in case 2, I am related to a mental banana, this view says that in case 2, I am related to a subsisting, but not an existing, banana. But it has proved to be just as unpopular (if not more so). The main problem is that while it is possible to distinguish the words ‘subsists’ and ‘exists’, nobody has a clear idea about what difference in fact these words are supposed to mark. What is it to say that Nessie, or a banana, subsists but not exist? Unless there is a clear answer to this question, we only have an illusory answer here to AH.

### **5. Representationalism.**

The adverbialist and the Meinongian together were the traditional non-sense-data responses to AH in the twentieth century. But neither of them is very attractive on their own terms. Perhaps because of this, in more recent times, two further proposals have been developed. In the next few sections we will discuss the first of these proposals, representationalism, in some detail.

Representationalism can itself be understood in various ways. However, on one natural way of understanding it, the representationalist begins with the observation that, that while we may *see* a banana in case 1 but not in case 2, presumably we may *believe* that there is a banana on the desk in both cases. In case 1, for example, I *know* that there is a banana in front of me. Since knowledge entails belief—if you know that *p*, then you believe that *p*—it follows that in such a case I believe that there is a banana as well. Now, in case 2, I don’t know that there is a banana in front of me (because there isn’t). So this cannot be the reason that I believe that there is a banana. Nevertheless, it is plausible in this case that I believe that there is a banana anyway. After all, in case 2, it seems to me that there is a banana, and I

have no particular reason to distrust my senses. So that is why I believe that there is banana. Of course I am wrong and my belief is false. But for my belief to be false I must have it. So both case 1 and case 2 are reasonably described as involving belief.

Having noted this point about belief, the representationalist goes on to suggest that we should think about perception somewhat in the way that it is natural to think about belief. Now, in philosophy of mind and language, belief is what is called a *propositional attitude*. If I believe that there is a banana on the desk, I am related in a certain kind of way to a proposition, viz., the proposition that there is a banana on the desk. I might bear this relation to, and so believe, a different proposition, as when I believe that there is no banana on the desk, or that a watermelon is on the desk, or that the Democrats will win. And I might have a different attitude to the same proposition, as when I *hope* (out of hunger, say) that there is a banana on the desk. For the representationalist, perception is, or at least involves, a propositional attitude too, just as believing and hoping do. We might put this by saying that, just as one might believe or hope that there is a banana on the desk, so too one might *perceptually represent* that there is a banana on the desk.

So the representationalist wants to say that there is a propositional attitude, which we might call ‘perceptual representation,’ that is rather like belief. How like belief is it? Well, in one sense it is very like belief. For example, just as belief is a propositional attitude that can be true or false, so perceptual representation is attitude that can be veridical or non-veridical. In case 1, I veridically represent that there is a banana on the desk, whereas in case 2 I non-veridically represent the same thing. Indeed, some early defenders of representationalism thought that perception is so much like belief that it is identical to belief (or at least to belief of a certain kind); a related view is that perceptual appearance is identical with a disposition or inclination to believe (cf. Armstrong 1968).

In more recent developments of representationalism, this identification of perception either with belief itself or with an inclination to believe has mainly been rejected (Cf. Evans 1982). There are a number of reasons for this. First, I can perceptually represent it to be the case that *p* even if I have no inclination to believe that *p*, and in fact do not do so. For example, suppose I hallucinate a banana on my desk not because I am in a coma in a hospital bed but because I have knowingly taken a drug that induces such hallucinations. Since in such a case I know about the drug I will have no inclination to believe that there is a banana on my desk; nevertheless it will appear to me to be so, and in that sense I will perceptually represent that it is so. Second, I may be inclined to believe that *p*, and do so, even if I do not perceptually represent that *p*. For example, suppose I am blind and someone I trust tells me that there is a banana on my desk. Third, take a case in which I do indeed have the inclination or disposition to believe that *p*. Whenever one has a disposition like this, it is natural to go on to ask what grounds or explains the disposition. At least in some cases, however, an appropriate answer will surely be, “I perceptually represent that there is a banana on the desk, and that is why I am inclined to believe it.” If so the representation and disposition are distinct since the presence of the first explains the presence of the second.

## **6. Conceptual and Non-conceptual content.**

In addition to these arguments against the identification of perception and belief, it is sometimes suggested that the two differ in psychologically and epistemologically more far reaching ways too. It natural to say that when I believe that there is a

banana I must possess or have the concept of a banana, where ‘having the concept of a banana’ means, roughly, knowing what it is to be a banana or understanding what it is to be banana. It can’t be true that I believe that there is a banana on the desk unless I have the concept of a banana (and of a desk for that matter).

On the other hand, when I perceptually represent that there is a banana, I do *not* require the concept of a banana—or so, at any rate, it seems plausible to think. For example, suppose I am new to the country of bananas and have never come across them before. When I see one on a desk, it seems correct to say both that I perceive a banana and that I have no idea what a banana is. In such a case, I will lack the concept of a banana and yet according to the representationalist I will perceptually represent that there is a banana. So a further way in which perception and belief might be distinguished is that if you believe something then you must have the relevant concepts whereas if you perceive something then you don’t.

The distinction between perception and belief that we have just made focuses on what is required of you in order that you believe something or perceive something. To believe something it is required that the believer has certain concepts, whereas to perceive something it is not. However, a lot of philosophers put this point differently. They don’t say that in order to believe something you must have certain concepts. They rather say that when you believe something the content of your belief is conceptual. Correlatively, they don’t say that in order to perceive something you don’t need to have certain concepts; they rather say that when you perceive something, the content of your perception is non-conceptual. In other words, this way of drawing the distinction between perception and belief says that there is a specific sort of content that a perception has, non-conceptual content, and that this distinguishes it from belief, which has its own special sort of content, conceptual content. And different philosophers have gone on to develop theories of it can be for the content of your belief to be conceptual, and what it can be for the content of your perception to be non-conceptual.

This way of drawing the distinction between belief and perception is somewhat controversial (Cf. Stalnaker 1998). Suppose I believe something, say that there is a yellow banana on the desk. As we noted before, the usual assumption in philosophy of mind is that if I believe something then I stand in a relation to a certain propositions, in this case the proposition that there is a yellow banana on the desk. Now according to the representationalist, I believe that there is a yellow banana on the desk because it perceptually appears to me that there is a yellow banana on the desk. But this makes it look as if the thing that I bear the relation to in believing, i.e. the proposition that there is a banana on the desk, is the very same thing as the thing that I bear a relation to standing in a relation in perceptually representing. But then it is impossible to say that the first is conceptual while the second is not. As a matter of logic, you can’t say that A is identical to B and that A has a property which B lacks; similarly you can’t say that the content of belief just is the content of perception, and yet the first is conceptual while the second is not.

However exactly the distinction between conceptual and non-conceptual content is made out, it is important to note that not everyone agrees that perception is non-conceptual or indeed that belief is conceptual for that matter. Some philosophers (Stalnaker 1998) think that one might truly said to believe something even in cases in which one lacks the relevant concept; for example, we sometimes say that a dog believes that his owner has thrown the ball, but it not clear that we would want to say that a dog has the concept of ownership. And other philosophers have argued that,



given the epistemological role of perception, in particular its role in providing us with justified belief and knowledge about the world, perception must be conceptual (cf. McDowell 1994). Their intuitive thought is that only something sufficiently like belief could justify a belief, if that is right then perception and belief can't be distinct in this sense.

### **7. Perception as Representational Versus Perception as Relational**

We have been looking at the representationalist idea that perception is analogous to, even if not quite identical to, belief. But, to return now to our main line of discussion, what does representationalism have to do with the argument from hallucination? We have seen how adverbialism and the Meinong-inspired view try to answer this argument, but it may be obscure how (if at all) the representationalist does so.

To bring this out, notice that in presenting the AH we routinely talked of perceiving something, such as a banana; for example, according to the first premise in case 2 I perceive something. But when we talk about perceiving something we don't have in mind the idea that we perceive propositions. Even if we *believe* propositions, we don't *perceive* them, at any rate not by sensory perception (cf. Thau 2001). Rather, what we perceive by the senses are physical objects, like bananas, and perhaps properties of these objects, like their movement or color. In other words, there is a distinction to be drawn between two different ideas we might have in mind when we talk about perception. The first idea is the one introduced by the representationalist; perception as a propositional attitude, e.g. the notion of perceptual representation. The second idea is the one that is or seems to be in operation in AH: perception as relation between a person and a physical object. In the light of this distinction, it might seem that that, far from having any response to AH, the representationalist has missed the point entirely. That argument is about perception considered as a relation, but the representationalist is talking about something else, viz., perception considered as a representation.

One option for the representationalist at this point is to deny the distinction between perceptual representation and perception relations. But this seems implausible, and in any case does nothing to resolve the difficulty. The better option is to agree that there are these two notions here but to offer an account of the relation between them. There might be various ways to do this but a relatively straightforward way is to suggest what perception in the relational sense entails perception in the representational sense but not vice versa. So on this view, for example, it is necessarily the case that if I see (i.e. perceive in the relational sense) a banana on my desk, I perceptually represent that there is a banana on the desk; on the other hand, I may perceptually represent that there is a banana on the desk without actually seeing the banana on the desk. To put it differently, the relation between perceptual representation and seeing is, according to the representationalist, rather like the relation between knowledge and belief. If I know that there is a yellow banana on the desk, this entails that I believe that there is a yellow banana, but not vice versa; similarly if I see a yellow banana on the desk this entails that I perceptually represent that there is a yellow banana on the desk.

There are in fact a number of questions that arise for this suggestion. For one thing, in the case of knowledge and belief, many philosophers think not only that knowledge entails belief but that knowledge can be analyzed in terms of belief plus various other conditions; is the representationalist saying that that is also true in the case of perception, i.e. that seeing is to be analyzed as perceptual representation plus

some further conditions? Moreover, it is true *in the first place* that if I perceive something then I perceptually represent that such and such is the case? These are questions that have been pressed with some force in recent times by an approach in the philosophy of perception called ‘disjunctivism’. We will turn to disjunctivism at the end of this article. For the moment, let us concentrate on how the representationalist who adopts this account of the representation/relation distinction might answer the AH.

As we have seen, first premise of the argument says that in case 2, I perceive something. For the representationalist, however, this is false. It is true of course that in case 1 I perceive something, and it is true that in both cases I perceptually represent that there is a banana. But is not true that in case 2 I perceive something. In case 2 I perceptually represent that there is banana not because I see the banana but because of hallucinating that there is a banana while in hospital.

It might be objected that all a proponent of the argument from hallucination has in mind when he or she says in case 2 that I perceive something is that I have a state of perceptual representation. This seems unlikely given the point mentioned before: that we perceive objects and not propositions. But in any case, even if this is what was meant, the representationalist can now respond that premise 2 of the argument is false. Premise 2 says that if I perceive something in case 2, then I perceive something mental in case 2. If ‘I perceive something’ is interpreted to mean ‘I perceptually represent that such and such is the case’, then this premise is false. For, from the fact that I bear a relation to a proposition, it does not follow that the proposition is mental. Indeed, it clearly isn’t true that the proposition is mental. Propositions are abstract objects and so are neither mental nor physical on any ordinary understanding of those notions.

Our guiding question was: what is perception such that it plays its epistemological role. The answer of the representationalist is that perception is a relation between a person and an object or property that obtains just when that object or property plays the right kind of causal role in bringing about a relevant state of perceptual representation. This answer is different from any we have looked at so far. First, it is different from the sense-datum theory. The sense datum theory says that I perceive a physical object by seeing something mental. The representationalist disagrees. It is true that, for the representationalist, when I perceive something, I bear a relation to a proposition. But I do not see or perceive that proposition. Second, it is different from the adverbialist. The adverbialist says that when one perceives a banana one does not thereby stand in any relation to a banana. The representationalist disagrees. Perceiving a banana does involve standing in a certain kind of causal or explanatory relation to a banana, and so it involves standing in a relation to a banana *a fortiori*. Third, it is different from the Meinongian. The Meinongian says that when one hallucinates a banana one stands in relation to a subsistent rather than an existent banana. The representationalist disagrees. It is true that propositions can be true or false, and as a result of this perceptual appearance can be veridical or not; but nowhere need the representationalist appeal to an exists/subsists distinction.

## **8. The Phenomenal Character of Perception**

The representationalist provides an attractive answer to AH. Nevertheless, there are a number of controversial aspects of the position. One source of controversy concerns an important theme in the whole discussion of perception, a theme I have so far been ignoring. This is the phenomenal or sensory character of perception.

In a normal case in which I perceive something, such as the yellow banana, it not only is the case that I come to know something it is also true that I enjoy a certain conscious episode. Many philosophers use the phrase ‘what it is like’ to capture this aspect of perception. The idea is that when I see a banana or seem to see one, there is something it is like for me to do this. In this way, perception seems to contrast strongly with belief. When I believe something, say that snow is white, there seems to be no particular reason to suppose that there is thereby something it is like for me to believe this. For example, if I am out cold in a coma it might well be true to say that I believe that snow is white, but it is not true to say that I am enjoying any sort of conscious episode.

Not only does perception seem to be the sort of state that has phenomenal character, the phenomenal character of perception plays a role in the two cases we have been concentrating on. Case 1 seems to be a case in which I have a certain sort of experience. And in a sense Case 2 seems to involve the very same experience. The type of experience I have in case 1 just is the type of experience I have in case 2. What it is like for me to perceive a banana just is what it is like for me to hallucinate the banana. The phenomenal character of the two episodes is the same.

So there is something it like to perceive a banana, and moreover what is it like to perceive a banana in case 1 is just what it is like to seem to perceive a banana in case 2. But so what? What question does this raise for the representationalist? Well, according to them, in both cases I perceptually represent that such and such is the case. In both cases, we might say I am in state with a certain *representational character*. But as we have seen, what it is like for me to perceive in case 1 is just what is like for me to perceive in case 2. In both cases, in other words, I am in a state with a certain *phenomenal character*. Now the question is: what is the relation between phenomenal character and representational character?

One answer to this question is often attributed to the 18<sup>th</sup> century philosopher Thomas Reid. (Again, whether it is in fact Reid’s view need not detain us.) On this view the two elements, phenomenal and representational character, are simply two distinct properties of perception. It is true that they go together, but this correlation is simply a matter of contingent fact rather than flowing from the nature of either representational or phenomenal character. At least without further modification however, this Reid-inspired view is implausible. It predicts, for example, that a particular perceptual episode might be one of seeing a banana, and yet what it is like for you to undergo the episode is as if you were climbing Mt. Everest.

A different answer is that the phenomenal character of my seeing a banana and its representational character are identical, i.e., numerically one and the same. This proposal obviously avoids problem of the Reid-inspired view, but it nevertheless faces other difficulties. The problem this time is that states or episodes with the same phenomenal character seem in principle anyway to be associated with distinct representational characters. And if that is the case then it is impossible that the phenomenal character of an experience is strictly identical with its representational character.

Why is it the case that the phenomenal character of an experience can be associated with distinct representational characters? Well, on the representationalist view, when I see a yellow banana, it follows that it perceptually appears to me that some proposition is true. But which proposition exactly? Up to now we have been tacitly assuming that the proposition is (what philosophers call) a general proposition, i.e. that there is a yellow banana. In other words, we have been assuming that seeing a

yellow banana entails representing that there is a yellow banana. But it seems perfectly possible that I see, not simply *a* banana, but *this* banana, i.e., this very one. In that case it is natural to suppose that the proposition that I perceptually represent to be the case is (what philosophers call), a singular proposition, proposition about a quite specific banana, e.g. that this banana is yellow. However, once it is granted that I may perceptually represent singular propositions of this sort, it is short step to the idea that different representational characters may be associated with distinct phenomenal characters. For imagine that we have two numerically distinct but duplicate bananas. It seems reasonable to say that what it is like to see this *this* banana is what it is like seeing *that* banana, i.e. since the bananas are duplicates; hence these two episodes of seeing have the same phenomenal character. Nevertheless, they will have different representational characters, since in the first case I perceptually represent the singular proposition that this banana is yellow, while in the second case I perceptually represent the distinct singular proposition that that banana is yellow.

The fact that representational character can come apart from phenomenal character means that the relation between them cannot be one of identity. But we have seen that the relation cannot be mere contingent correlation either. At this point it is very natural to say that the relation is one of supervenience. The invocation of supervenience here is analogous to its use in other areas of philosophy. For example it is common for moral philosophers to say that, for any two actions, if they are alike in respect of the natural characteristics, then they are alike in respect of their moral characteristics. Likewise the representationalist can say that, for any two experiences, if they are alike in respect of representational character, they are alike with respect to their phenomenal character. This idea permits us to explain why Case 1 and Case 2 are phenomenally identical. They involve the same state of perceptual representation, i.e. a perceptual appearance with the same content. So, given supervenience, they involve the same phenomenal character.

### **9. The Inverted Spectrum**

The idea that the phenomenal character of a perceptual state supervenes on its representational character seems on the face of it more plausible than the other proposals about how these two features are related. Indeed, this supervenience claim is often thought of as constituting representationalism itself (cf. Byrne 2001).

However, while the supervenience claim is plausible and central, it has nevertheless generated a surprising number of puzzles. Some of these puzzles involve cases in which the supervenience thesis is apparently false, i.e., cases in which two experiences have the same content but differ in phenomenal character. A fairly straightforward example, but by no means the only example, is provided by the inverted spectrum hypothesis. Suppose it perceptually appears to Boris that there is a yellow banana on the table. One could imagine someone who was inverted with respect to Boris—call her ‘Doris’—so that she too is having a perceptual experience as of there being a yellow banana, and yet Doris has the experience that Boris would have just if he were to see a red banana. We can imagine that Doris and Boris are disposed to speak and act in precisely the same ways; both will insist that they are seeing a yellow banana, that they are not seeing a red banana, and so on.

Now, in such a case it seems reasonable to say that the phenomenal character of Boris and Doris’s experience are different; what it is like for Boris is not what it is like for Doris. On the other hand, it has seemed plausible at least to some people to

say that the representational content of their experiences are the same. To motivate this idea, one might think that the representational content of the experience is function of the properties in the world that cause or control the experience. But it seems clear that the property of being yellow (perhaps we might think of this as the property of reflecting light at a certain wavelength) just is that property. If so, then Boris and Doris have exactly the same representational content.

How might a representationalist respond to this objection? One option that has been explored in some detail is due to Sydney Shoemaker. Shoemaker proposes that the representational character of the experience is more complicated than we have been suggesting so far. Boris and Doris might represent being yellow, but they also represent a different property, which Shoemaker calls an appearance property. Shoemaker goes on to say that there are various possibilities for what this further property could be. One possibility (which Shoemaker himself does not endorse) the appearance property might be what philosophers sometimes call primitive colors. These are properties that physical objects seem to have but don't. Such a view would say that both Boris and Doris have non-veridical experiences in the case at hand—a position that Shoemaker calls 'figurative projectivism'.

In order to avoid the suggestion that perceptual appearances of color are routinely non-veridical, Shoemaker himself suggests that the property could be something else, namely the property of causing a particular experience in me, or of being disposed to cause a particular experience in me. But it is unclear whether we should include the notion of perceptual experience into the very content of perceptual experience. Other authors have suggested different possibilities. (Cf. Egan).

### **10. Veridical Perception and Veridical Hallucination**

The sort of problem for representationalism that is generated by the inverted spectrum has its source in the idea that phenomenal character might come apart from representational character. A slightly different problem has to do with the notion of veridical perception. John Searle, for example, argued that if I am in state of perceptual appearance, this state is veridical only if the state bears a relation to the object seen. So, for example, my perceptual appearance that there is a yellow banana is veridical only if the banana that I see is causing the appearance in question. Searle drew the consequence that content of the experience not only includes a self-referential element, it also includes a reference to a causal relation.

Searle's suggestion about the content of experience, like Shoemaker's, has generated a number of questions. One problem is that it seems to portray perceivers as being overly sophisticated. Presumably very young children and animals can have experiences of yellow bananas. But do they really have experiences about their experience? And do they have experiences about bananas causing this experience? To suppose so seems objectionable. However, it is not quite clear why a proponent of this sort of causal view might not appeal the conceptual/non-conceptual distinction here. If to perceive a banana does not require having the concept of a banana, why does perceiving that the banana is causing this very experience require either the concept of causation or of this experience?

A very different objection to this proposal is that it excludes the possibility of veridical hallucination. To see this possibility, let us imagine a case that is in some ways like Case 2—in such a case I seem to see a banana, I seem to know that there is a banana and so on. But now let us fill out the case in the following way. The reason that I seem to see a banana is that I have been given some sort of drug by a mad

scientist. But, strange as it seems, I am in fact in front of my desk and there is a yellow banana on it. On the one hand, this case seems like a case of hallucination. On the other hand, it seems as if the hallucination is in this case veridical. The problem for the view that the concept of perception includes a causal element is that it rules out this possibility.

One might try to respond to this by accepting that veridical hallucinations are implausible. But this seems unsatisfactory. For one thing, veridical hallucination seems perfectly possible. In addition, the possibility of veridical hallucination is important in the history of philosophy of perception in a different way. It has been common since Grice (1961) to argue that, in order to distinguish veridical hallucination from cases of genuine seeing, there must be a causal relation between the thing seen and the state of seeing itself. Grice's question was: how to distinguish veridical hallucination from perception proper? His answer was that in genuine cases of perception there is a causal relation between the thing seen and the state of seeing. A representationalist might take account of Grice's point by saying that in a case of genuine seeing, the object seen causes a perceptual appearance as of there being an object. But if veridical hallucination is impossible we lose this argument for the causal theory of perception.

Instead of biting the bullet, and denying that veridical hallucination is a possibility, there is a different way for the representationalist to respond to Searle without denying the possibility of veridical hallucination. Searle's idea is that, in order for a perceptual state to be veridical, the object seen must cause the state to come into being. But there are two different things that might be issue when we focus on a perceptual state's being veridical. On the one hand, we might mean that the proposition that characterizes the state is true; on the other hand, one might mean that the state itself if veridical just because it is caused in the right kind of way by a particular object. On the first notion of veridicality, we get Searle's conclusion; but on the second we do not.

### **11. Disjunctivism.**

The central question of perception that we have been focusing was this: What is perception such that it plays the epistemological role that it does? I motivated that question by considering the argument from hallucination. As we saw, there is considerable agreement that the argument from hallucination is wrong, but much less agreement about where. So far I have considered four responses to this argument, and so four responses to our central question: the sense-datum view, the adverbial view, the Meinong-inspired view, and representational view. In this last section I want to consider briefly a fifth response, that of the disjunctivist.

All of the proposals we have so far in considered agree that there is something very important in common between Case 1 and Case 2. The adverbialist says that in both cases I perceive banana-ishly. The sense-data theory says that in both cases I directly see a mental banana. The Meinongian says that in both cases I see a banana that subsists. And the representationalist says that in both cases I perceptually represent that there is a banana.

The key point about disjunctivism is that it denies this. For the disjunctivist the two cases share nothing important psychologically shared between the case. It is true that in both cases I *either* see a banana *or* seem to see a banana. But, for the disjunctivist, this commonality is fake. It is like the commonality between a raven and a writing desk. True, both a raven and a writing desk have in common, viz., the

property being either a raven or a writing desk; but this does not indicate that the things that fall under this property have anything deeply in common. Similarly, says the disjunctivist, we might say that both cases share the property of being either a case of seeing or a case of seeming to see; but this does not indicate that the things that fall under this property have anything deeply in common.

How does this view of perception respond to AH? Well, according to the first premise of that argument, in case 2 I perceive something. For the disjunctivist, this premise is false, at least if by 'perceive' we mean 'see'. It is simply false that I perceive a banana in case 2. Nor is it true that I perceive something. Nor is it true that I am in a state that is psychologically like perceiving. All that is true is that in Case 2 I hallucinate or seem to see a banana. For the disjunctivist, in other words, the two cases—the perceptual case and the hallucinatory case—involve psychologically different states. To the point differently, the argument from hallucination trades on the idea that we are inclined to describe both cases in the same way; but this is what the disjunctivists wants to resist.

The main problem with disjunctivism is that it is difficult to shake the feeling that there *is* something in common here. So we would need a significant argument for the hypothesis that there is not. Is there such an argument? Well one line of thought here is to suggest that this was the only way in which one could resist AH. On this view, one is either a disjunctivist or a sense-datum theorist. Given that choice, one might well go for disjunctivism. Indeed, one might go further and say that if one's choices are disjunctivism, on the one hand, and one of either sense-datum theory adverbialism or meingongianism on the other, then the choice is clear. But of course with the development of representationalism the logical situation looks very different.

There is however a more searching line of thought for the disjunctivist to develop here. This is to criticize the representationalist's key notion of perceptual representational. As we have seen, the representationalist not only thinks that I do perceptually represent, but in addition they think that the ordinary notion of perceiving a banana might be explained in terms; at least a representationalist thinks that if I perceive a banana, then I perceptually represent that there is a banana. Now, apart from a very brief comment in section XX above, we have so far adopted this notion rather uncritically and formulated representationalism in terms of it. However, it is open to the disjunctivist to insist that that it is unclear that there is any such notion here, and, related to this, it is unclear that perceptual phenomena like seeing a banana can always be explained in terms of it. If that notion can be shown to be of reasonable clarity, then so is representationalism itself. But if it is not, our options narrow once again.

At this point however the philosophy of perception meets up with much larger questions about standards of clarity and philosophical methodology, about what can be accepted as clear and why, and about whether we need to explain the notion of perceiving in terms of anything else. The main problem is that it is hard to see what the standards of clarity from which one can criticize the representationalist notion of perceptual appearance. If representationalism is a genuinely available option in the philosophy of perception, it is hard to see the rationale for disjunctivism; but if it is not, as it might not be, disjunctivism become more plausible.

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