

## A Direct Object of Perception

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**Abstract:** I will use three simple arguments to refute the thesis that I appear to directly perceive a mind-independent material object. The theses I will use are similar to the time-gap argument and the argument from the relativity of perception. The visual object of imagination and the object of experience are in the same place. They also share common qualities such as the content, subjectivity, change in virtue of conditions of observers, and the like. This leads to the conclusion that both a tree-image and a tree-experience are distinct from a material tree. Perception of an object is caused by human nature, the senses and consciousness, and mind may prevent the direct perception of the external world. The strongest objection against that consequence is that there is no extra entity called sense-datum or appearance between a subject-in-itself and a real external thing-in-itself. That is, we see books, not book-images. The possible reply would be that a person sees no mental pictures except that which they see via pictures.

**Keywords:** perception, object, appearance, mental image, physical thing.

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## 1 Introduction

Many medieval and modern philosophers distinguished a mental thing from an external object. For example, when an architect has an image of a house in his or her mind, a house exists as ‘potentially’, whereas a real house exists as an actualized entity. An entity situated in mind has been called both form and object, as René Descartes did. On the other hand, an entity located in the external world has also been referred to as an object and a form, and this can cause confusion. Nevertheless, the distinction between a mental picture of silver coins and the real silver coins in hand should be easily understood.

A perceptual visual appearance has been related to an imaginary entity not only in the philosophies of John Locke (1690/1975), David Hume (1739/1969) and George Berkeley (1734/1996), but also in the cognitive sciences. The studies of Stephen Kosslyn (2003, 2005) and Zenon Pylyshyn (2002, 2003) have been especially remarkable. However, these studies have not focused on the ontology of these two phenomena being in relation to a human person and the substance of the external world. A human person is an embodied scene to these mental events. In fact, there are very good reasons to claim that a mental image and the object of perception are similar entities, although they would not be identical. From this claim logically follows *a hypothesis* that they are distinguished in their nature from the supposed mind-independent entities, and these entities are causal factors in perceiving them but not in visualizing them.

I argue that the hypothesis is true by presenting three arguments *against* the claim that a perceptual object is a mind-independent entity. It seems to me that such arguments have not been presented in this way in earlier studies of philosophy of perception. They have nothing to do with arguments concerning illusion and hallucination. In addition, I do not infer from the results the non-existence of the external world and the mind-independent objects, as George Berkeley (1734/1996) does.

## 2 The Object of Perception and the Image are Mind-dependent

The first argument is based on the general thought about the different spatial location of things. A starting point is an assumption that the material object hypothesis is untrue because perceptual appearance arises within a human person (or in another animal). That is, what is in one substance is not in substance base.

- 1) B is in A and C is in D.
- 2) B and C are entities external to one another, as are A and D.
- 3) B is not simultaneously in A and D, and C is not simultaneously in D and A (from 1 and 2).
- 4) Some B is only in A (from 1 and 3).
- 5) Therefore, some B is not in D (from 3 and 4).

When A is a human subject in which a perceptual appearance B arises, it is logically and really impossible that B would also be in the external substance D at the same time in which a surface C exists. Therefore, the conclusion cannot be that a perceptual appearance B is not the external material substance D. In sum, the material object hypothesis is untrue.

The second argument is directed against direct realism. There is an assumption that an image and an object of perception are, in essence, the same kinds of entities. The conclusion states that an object of perception is not always a material body of the external world.

- 1) An image of x is a mind-dependent entity not possessing space.
- 2) An image of x shares similar qualities with an object x of perception.
- 3) They are subjective, sensory, conscious and within a person.
- 4) Therefore, an object x is of perception and is a mind-dependent entity not possessing space (from 1, 2 and 3).

When having an image of an elliptical shape, and when sensing an elliptical shape in mind, it is very hard to understand why one infers from these two phenomena that one of them is the real external thing that is not even elliptical. Logically considering, a real external thing has many more properties than a mental picture about that thing in mind. However, this does not mean that these properties would not refer to the entity of the external world. In particular, an argument against direct realism would be a common picture argument:

- 1) An image of a small elliptical shape is mind-dependent.
- 2) Images share a common picture with visual objects of experiences.
- 3) Therefore, a small elliptical shape of experience is mind-dependent.

It is clear that the content of mental images and visual experiences can be similar. A face-appearance is similar in an image of a face and in a face of experience. Whatever mental images

and objects of experiences are, they are not *material bodies* of the external world. They are located in different places than the external world.

The third argument presents the idea that the existence of the external object (if any) is not a sufficient reason to experience perception.

- 1) A human person and her or his own qualities are necessary for perceiving an object.
- 2) Perceiving an object is dependent upon a human person, such as upon his or her visual angle.
- 3) Therefore, the existence of an external object is not sufficient reason to perceive an object.

It is possible that if the brain and its specialized neural cells cause sense perception, then a direct perception of things located in the external world is impossible. For example, a perception of a noise, a perception of a colour red or perception of a face-appearance is caused by human nature, the neural cells of the brains, etc. Finally, it is certain that word analysis and thinking cannot show what a round shape of experience is and how it arises from human nature.

In the next chapter, I will go through the premises of these arguments and seek to determine if there is something which easily disproves them.

### **3 Critical Evaluation of the Premises**

The first and second premises of the first argument are absolutely self-evident. In general, when B is in A and C in D and B is not C and A is not D, then their truths cannot be doubted as such. A particular case can be two houses – A and D – where Carl is in house A and a lamp is in house D. Let there be B, Carl, and C, a lamp, from which it easily follows that B is not C. Of course, houses A and D are two different buildings. Thus, it is impossible to understand how Carl and a lamp would be in both houses at the same time. The analogue is a perception time in which A is a perceiving subject, D is the external world and C is the object in the external world, from which it follows that when a perceptual appearance B is realizing in A, then B is not C. The location of C is in D regardless of what an entity C that is dependent on the existence of D is. Therefore, the first two premises of the first argument can be acknowledged to be true.

The third general premise is also true because there are no means to find reasons which refute it. B is not in both A and D at the same time. C is not in both D and A. When Carl is in house

A, he is not in house D because A and D are distinct houses. When a lamp is located in house D, it is therefore not located in house A, where Carl is staying. Some objections may be the concept of possible worlds and quantum physics, both of which try to prove that one and the same entity can be located in two different places at the same time. However, the example does not negate a perception time: Jack's perceptual appearance is not within Jack and Jill at the same time, because a mental state does not move from one person to another. It is not possible that Jill's circulation would be located in both Jill and Jack. Nevertheless, our aim is not to try to prove imagined worlds as true or perform experiments with quantum physics. Therefore, the third premise is acknowledged to be true.

The fourth premise is problem-free. If something is in some other substance, then a statement that something is in some other substance is true. Carl is in house A. The conclusion is only that Carl is not in any other houses other than house A. On the other hand, it is hard to understand why Carl's image of New York would be in some other person in addition to Carl. It is also certain that Carl's image of New York is not located in New York, even though the image would refer to that metropolis. It is impossible to find reasons why a visual perceptual idea would not be in a subject, because it cannot occur in front of a person in the streets of New York. The examples show that the fourth premise is true, and thus the argument is valid.

The most complicated instance is that of a perceptual appearance. Is it an appearance *x* within a person or within the external world? However, if it is like an image, then a logical inference is that a perceptual appearance of New York and an appearance of Marilyn Monroe's face are in a subject who is conscious of them. The second argument shows that this is the case.

The first premise of the second argument presents the visualizing of *x* as a mental being. We cannot know how a mental image of *x* would *not* be mind-dependent or in mind. Maybe this can be criticized by stating that an image of *x* and visualizing this *x* are dependent on a body, especially on the brain. However, the criticism does not change the fact that an image of *x* is within a subject, and that image is not an entity of the external world like a book containing a picture of Marilyn Monroe. An artist's idea is always a different thing than a physical piece of art. From the ontological point of view, it is not essential which mechanism causes mental images, but how these images exist and what the nature of a mental image is. In brief, the first premise must be true.

The second premise is a real philosophical problem and a test of these three arguments. Why

would a perceptual appearance be the same kind of entity as an image, and not a material object? Most people say that they perceive a material object because there is some matter in front of them. A material tree is what they perceive. They do not say that they are perceiving a mental idea of a material tree. Human nature may be a quality that leads us to infer that the world is as the senses present it to us. As George Berkeley states, the appearances to the senses are so strong that they make us regard them as the objects of the external material world even if the matter did not exist. Introspection demonstrates that the image of a tree and the perceptual object of a tree share similar content and qualities, from which it logically follows that both are subjective entities which are not outside of a perceiving person. For example, an image of Marilyn Monroe is clearly similar in content to a Marilyn Monroe of sense experience, although a mind-dependent image can come into existence without an external thing. It seems that there are no good reasons to reject the second premise.

The premise of the third argument is true. It must be true that one's own qualities are necessary for perception. Damage in an observer would explain and predict why she will not perceive in a future situation. However, of course, this argument alone does not prove that one would not directly perceive mind-independent objects. For example, we can easily say that we see rivers, houses and roses, and that they are causes of our perception about them. The first and the second argument contend that that is not the case. Visual perception means eyeing or measuring an object. The problem is: Is an object of perception identical with a mind-independent thing? In his paper *The Transparency of Experience*, M. G. F. Martin (2002) claims that they are identical on the grounds of introspection. I do not think that introspection proves that they are indeed identical.

A conscious perceptual entity *is not like* the material entity of the external world. It is impossible to define and understand a perceptual appearance as a three-dimensional body possessing a certain place in space in which we will meet it in a future situation. However, from this impossibility we do not continue to infer that there is no material world. If a material entity partly causes our appearances within us, then *we know* that entity through an appearance.

## **4 An Objection and a Reply**

One may object by claiming that I have misunderstood the arguments of anti-sceptics. There is one central difficulty that could be raised. Why would we think that there really is a sense-datum between an observer and the mind-independent objects? That is, we see books, not visual

book sense-data, they criticize. The following is how they may argue in favour of a thesis that there is no an extra entity or veil of perception:

- 1) A mind-independent object is what we sense, although someone may wrongly think of it as a mental item.
- 2) Therefore, there is no extra entity between a mind-independent object and an observer.

A real thing and a thing of experience are the same. One does not see a replica or a tiny picture about a material thing, but a thing as such, like the contour of a house.

It is possible that the objection suffers the same implausible belief as the claim “Perceived objects are like unperceived objects”. Can we show unperceived objects? No, because we always say what we see, hear, touch, smell and taste. We talk about sensible objects. We say that we know these things through the senses, not without the senses.

Do the terms ‘via the senses’ and ‘through the senses’ mean that perceiving an object does not directly occur, but is always mediated? The correct interpretation seems to be that perceiving an object is not direct. One can never verify that the external world is like their senses present it to be. Richard Fumerton rightly argues that in order to establish that sensations are signs of physical objects one would have to *observe* a correlation between sensations and the existence of certain physical objects. He continues that to observe such a correlation in order to establish a connection, one would need independent access to physical objects. This one cannot have if all one knows directly is that certain sensations occur. (Fumerton: 1992: 339) I think that all I directly know in perceiving an object is certain sensations. On the other hand, these terms do not necessarily mean that we see object-pictures or hear sound-experiences. We would not perceive appearances of a tree but the tree via appearances.

Let me give an example to elucidate a notion of ‘via appearances’. When an astronomer observes the night sky using a telescope, she does not think that she sees images of the telescope, but rather images of the planet Mars. However, the images are necessary in order to see the planet Mars with the telescope. These images arise from the lens system of the telescope. In the same way, the tiny images in the retina of eyes are necessary in order to see houses, books and friends external to us. However, we would not see the images, but the things via images, such as Thomas Aquinas claims.

This example clearly shows that mind-independent objects do not correspond with appearances of objects or telescope images. Such correspondence may yield consequences that anti-sceptical realists and Berkeley would not want to hold by.

- 1) Mind-independent objects are mind-dependent appearances of objects.
- 2) Mind-dependent appearances of objects are the products of the brain's neural cellular events.
- 3) Therefore, mind-independent objects are the products of the brain's neural cellular events.

For example, it seems clear that there are sound-phenomena and colour-phenomena. It is possible that the causes of these phenomena are within a human person. Eliminative materialism sees mental phenomena as non-existent. Only the events of the physical brain exist. Therefore, it is very hard to understand why one creates correspondences between mind-independent objects and visual images of objects. The following may be a matter of fact:

- 1) It is possible that perception that is dependent on human nature and the brain and the human body prevents direct perception about the external world.
- 2) Therefore, it is possible that the claim 'One directly perceives sounds and colours of the external world' is untrue.

Anti-sceptical realists must explain what the meaning of 'perception' is in order to prove that perceiving an object *p* is about the object of the external world.

Finally, because there are many different claims about what the object *p* of perception is, perception only cannot show what one perceives. The implication 'One perceives *p* implies one knows *p*' is untrue because 'One perceives *p*' is true. However, 'One knows *p*' is untrue. One thing is certain. By analysing words, it is not known what appears to us when perceiving an object or what kind of thing that which appears to us is.

## 5 Conclusion

Perceptual experience presents what we perceive as mind-independent objects. This study claims that we perceive mind-dependent inner objects. In fact, the study claims that it seems that we perceive mind-independent objects, but we don't. Introspection demonstrates that the image of a tree and the perceptual object of a tree share similar content and qualities, from



which it logically follows that both are subjective entities which are not outside of a perceiving person. A mental image and the object of perception are distinguished in their nature from the supposed mind-independent entities. A conscious perceptual entity *is not like* the material entity of the external world. It is impossible to define and understand a perceptual appearance as a three-dimensional body possessing a certain place in space in which we will meet it in a future situation. The world as we experience it through our senses and as we imagine it in our minds and the world as it is ‘in itself’ are quite different.

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