

# Recap: intentionality and representation in perception

Seminar “Das Problem der Wahrnehmung”, Philipp Blum

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## **Mind-dependence a red herring**

I do not think it is useful, as it is usually done, to combine questions of perception – what is it? are there types of it? in what way does it put us in contact with the world? what are its objects? – with the question whether it, its objects or its products are mental or physical. The two issues should be kept apart because

- the distinction itself is unclear: physical things are those that are the ‘proper objects’ of any future physical science, but we no clear idea of how to define “proper object” and of how to individuate sciences;
- in addition, we have, at present, only a rudimentary understanding of what kind of things are physical;
- we are part of the natural world and so, at least in part, physical too; to what extent and in what way we are physical are also questions that are poorly understood and unresolved;
- “mind-dependence”, usually invoked to explain “mental”, is even less well understood: things may depend on others for their existence, their essence or their character, and it is not clear what sense of dependence on the mind will make a thing “mental”;
- specifically with perception, the question risks becoming either trivial or a posteriori: if minds are what perceives, all essential parts of the perceptive process are at least to this extent ‘mind-dependent’; if the question is about perceptual states, the question is best left to (some future replacement of current-day) psychology;
- to spell out ‘mind-dependence’ in terms of relationally, risks confusing the relational with (i) the relative, (ii) the non-self-subsistent and (iii) the extrinsic. All these three distinctions are relevant: colours, e.g., might be relational without the colour of a thing being relative to a perceiver, without colours being derivative on, or grounded in perceptions and without them being extrinsic properties of their objects.

As parts of the natural world, we, as well as many other animals and perhaps even some plants, interact with our environment on the basis of information we receive about it. The task of the philosophy of perception is to understand this interaction in its broadest terms, to understand its presuppositions and to conceptualise it in ways that hopefully some scientists will find useful.

## **The veridical case: our consciousness “out there with the cow”**

An Aristotelian theory of perception will take it to be the process by which we register, with the aid of specifically evolved organs that may or may not function correctly, the specific objects in terms of which our senses are defined: colours, sounds, smells, tastes, and tactile profiles. These are of different ontological kinds and are ‘had’ by and ‘of’ substances in different ways:

- colours are properties, of surfaces, and are monadic, albeit extrinsic; extrinsic on (though not related to) sensible profiles, which include a perceptual situation, perceptual organs and a perceptual milieu;
- sounds are processes, which include the perceiver; they are of some of the things that are part or causes of them
- smells are substances, which carry information about their sources;
- tastes are events, which are triggered, but not differentially explained by the things they are ‘of’ or have as participants;

- tactile profiles are aspects of four-dimensional space-time regions.

Colours are intrinsic not to the objects they are the colours of, but to their sensible profiles, which include the surface, the light, the medium and the perceptual apparatus. Sensible profiles are out there to be seen, and perceivers pick them up only partially, which results in an essentially perspectival perception – but one that is nevertheless of the object, as it includes the object as a part.

## **Response-dependence: distinguishing “red” from “funny”**

To account for their perceiver variability, colours, understood as proper sensibles of human perceptual apparatuses, are ‘dependent’ on those perceptions of which they are the possible objects. Such dependence does not make an account of them circular, as things may appear red without being red. Such appearance properties are properties had by objects which are indiscernible with respect to their colour – they are determinable, in virtue of the perception of which we perceive their determinates. Appearance properties are extrinsic: they are grounded in perceptual profiles, but had by the objects seen.

Response-dependent properties are fixpoints in an intentionality chain, but these differ for different types of properties:

**judgmental** to be cool is to be judged cool;

**epistemic** to be expensive is to be thought expensive;

**reactional** to be funny is to appear funny;

**perceptual** to be red is to appear red.

To appear red is a mode of presentation in the experience of the property red (intrinsically had by the perceptual profile) constituted by that very experiential response.

## **Discrimination thresholds and particular content**

Even though we cannot perceptually distinguish between different possible objects of perception, our perception is about one particular of them. This is puzzling – how can it be explained?

It is wrong to think of the problem as one of finding a mechanism that explains how we can ‘go the extra mile’, ‘reach out’ to ‘get a grip on’ this objects rather than that other indiscriminable one. The objects are already there, so to say, and have their sensible profiles, and depending on our make-up, the situation and our position, we manage to register more or less of that profile.

That not all of the profile ‘enters into’ the relation does not mean, nor entail, that only part of the thing or part of its profile is a relatum of the relation. That I cannot tell which of several candidates I perceive does not mean, nor entail I do not perceive any in particular. There are several ways to combine limited apparent selectivity with particularity:

- the limitation may be merely apparent, the relation may be selective in ways not manifest to me;
- there may be two relations: one of perception, one of perceptual discrimination, and the first may ‘cut finer’ than the second;
- which one of different candidates enters into the perceptual relation may depend on other factors among which I do not discriminate;
- I may stand in the relation to all of the candidates, and my perception be of any of them;
- the relation may be three-place, connecting me with a particular thing and an discrimination equivalence class (or quasi-equivalence class).

## **The prize of disjunctivism**

To give a disjunctivist account of relational representation in perception, we have to give up the ‘inner spotlight’ view of perceptual awareness. Martin, in ‘On Being Alienated’, shows us how this can be done.