

The arguments from illusion and hallucination

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The argument from hallucination

Another version of the argument from illusion, as an argument for the existence of "sense-data":

- (Pa)** An object can appear other than it really is.
- (Pb)** In these circumstances, we are aware of something that has the properties that the object lacks.
- (C1)** This "something" cannot be identical with the object in the world as these two things have different properties, therefore it must be an inner' object.
- (Pc)** There is no relevant difference between cases of illusion and cases of veridical perception.
- (C2)** If an inner object of awareness is posited in illusion, then it should be posited in the case of veridical perception.
- (Pd)** In perception, we are aware of something 'inner'.
- (C3)** All cases of experiences involve directly seeing/being aware of an inner object (sense-datum) which has the properties that the objects in the world appear to have.

The argument from hallucination as an argument for sense-data:

- (P1)** When I hallucinate I am not (immediately) aware of any 'worldly' object at all.
- (P2)** When I hallucinate I am nonetheless aware of something.
- (P3)** Hallucination and veridical perception are phenomenally indistinguishable.
- (P4)** Experiences that are phenomenally indistinguishable are of the same type.
- (P5)** Experiences of the same type have the same immediate objects.
- (C)** In perception, I am aware of something 'non-worldly'.

The argument is valid, but almost every premise has been challenged:

challenging P3 (and perhaps **Pa**?) The idea behind **P5**, that every perceptual experience involved in a non-illusionary perception could be had when one undergoes a hallucination, has been challenged by J.L. Austin: How do we know that indistinguishable hallucinations are possible? Evidence suggests that not. Austin in "Sense and Sensibilia": Dreaming that one meets the pope is not at all really like meeting the pope.

Reply: This argument won't do, because we are not arguing whether or not we actually have indistinguishable hallucinations, but whether these hallucinations are possible at all, i.e. whether they are metaphysically possible. There seems to be no compelling reason why not: If x causes a brain state and this brain state causes me to have an experience of the pope, there is no reason why something else, y , could not cause the brain state that causes me to have an experience of the pope.

rejecting P4 (and perhaps **Pc**?) It is not the case that experiences that are phenomenally indistinguishable are of the same type. Rather: Having an experience of one type might seem the same as having an experience of another type. This is the disjunctivist claim.

rejecting P2 (and perhaps **Pb**?) **P2** says that when I hallucinate I am nonetheless aware of something. This premise is encapsulated in Howard Robinson's "Phenomenal Principle":

If there sensibly appears to a subject to be something which possesses a particular sensible quality then there is something of which the subject is aware which does possess that sensible quality. (? : 32)

One might think this premise is question begging (already assuming what is to be proved). Why can

we not reject the phenomenological principle and say instead that we merely seem to be aware of an object that has the properties we seem to see?

Reply: This would then force sense-datum opponents to reject the principle for every kind of experience. So, even when we are having a veridical perception, we only seem to be aware of an object that has the properties we seem to see.

rejecting P5 Isn't "Experiences of the same type have the same immediate objects" also question begging?

Why can we not say phenomenally similar experiences have different objects? Reply: phenomenal principle.

Sense-data

The sense datum theorist is a 'common factor theorist': Same account of experience in hallucination and perception. The two main arguments for the sense-datum theory are the argument from illusion and the argument from hallucinating. There are two versions of the sense-datum theory:

- (i) representative or indirect realist theory of perception
- (ii) irrealist/idealist theory of perception

Realism, roughly, is the view that the objects we perceive exist, and have at least some of the features that we perceive them as having, even when they are not perceived. They are mind-independent. According to common sense and direct realism, we directly perceive mind-independent object. According to indirect realism, we indirectly perceive mind-independent objects in virtue of directly seeing sense-data. Sense-data represent how the world is to us. For now we will say:

(1) A perceiver *P* directly/immediate perceives an object *O* iff *P* perceives *O* without perceiving any intermediary *I*.

Sense-datum theorists claim to offer the best account of the phenomenology of perceptual experience. According to them, both veridical and non-veridical perception is a relation between a subject and an object. Sense-datum theory captures an important aspect of hallucination: It seems as if an object with certain features is presented or given to you in experience. Some have claimed sense-data theory does not give a good account of phenomenology of veridical experiences:

- it does seem as if we are directly aware of mind-independent objects
- it does not seem as if we are indirectly aware of them in virtue of being aware of sense-data.

This is sometimes called "transparency of experience": When we see a tree, we can only see the features of the tree not the features of the experience of the tree.

As we have seen, sense-datum theory is committed to some version of the phenomenological principle:

(2) If things appear to you in a certain way then some sense-datum actually is that way.

It looks like you can never be wrong about the nature of your sense-data: they have all the properties they appear to have. David Armstrong in "A Materialist Theory of Mind" (?) thus questions the nature of sense-data: When I look at a speckled hen, I have a sense-datum with a large number of speckles. Yet I do not know how many speckles. If sense-data are as they appear to be, then my sense-datum must have an indeterminate number. Objects, even mental objects, cannot be determinate in this way, "it is obvious that to be is to be determinate" (? : 220). But if there are a determinate number, then sense-data cannot be just as they appear to be. So either

- the nature of sense-data are indeterminate: this should be rejected for metaphysical reasons;
- or they are determinate, but then not how they appear to be: against the very idea of sense-data.

Frank Jackson in "Perception" (?) replies to Armstrong that sense-data are not indeterminate and that the sense-datum theorist is only committed to

(3) If things appear to you in a certain way, then some sense-datum actually is that way.

not to

(4) If a sense-datum is a certain way, then it appears that way.

Being perceptually aware of some characteristic is a sufficient condition to attribute this characteristic to a sense-datum, not a necessary one. But does this not turn sense-data into the *objects* of perception?

During the first half of the 20th century, most philosophers were sense data-theorists (eg B. Russell, A.J. Ayer, C.D. Broad, H.H. Price). Since then theory has mostly been rejected. Exceptions: Frank Jackson, Howard Robinson. Three things to know about sense-data:

1. "Sense-data" is a plural term, "sense-datum" is the singular.
2. Sense-data are mental objects present to the mind. They are not patterns of light on your eye or any property of your brain.
3. Terminological problem: G.E. Moore was one of the first sense-datum theorists. For him, sense-data are direct objects of perceptions whatever they turn out to be: his question was whether sense-data are physical mind-independent or non-physical mental objects. Nowadays, "sense-data" is used to mean immediate or direct objects of perception, and the objects are non-physical and mind-dependent.

References

- Armstrong, David M., 1968. *A Materialist Theory of the Mind*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.
Jackson, Frank, 1977. *Perception: a Representative Theory*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
Robinson, Howard, 1994. *Perception*. London: Routledge.