

# 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.
- (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 (on some interpretations), but almost every premise has been challenged:

**challenging P3** (and perhaps **Pa**?) The idea behind **P3**, 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” (1962): 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. (Robinson 1994: 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 experi-

ence. 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' who holds that we should give the 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:

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

(A better definition would use the tricky: "not: by perceiving any other object *I*" or "not: in virtue of perceiving any other object *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.

During the first half of the 20th century, most philosophers were sense data-theorists (e.g. B. Russell, A.J. Ayer, C.D. Broad, H.H. Price). Since then, the sense-datum 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.

## Objections to sense-data: phenomenological

Some have claimed sense-data theory does not give a good account of the 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. How does the sense-data theorist account for the transparency of experience? Other phenomenological objections:

- Are changes of experience really always brought about by a change in their objects?
- Can sense-data be impossible objects? Would this not be required to account for some perceptual or quasi-perceptual experiences?
- Can we account for the change in one's experience when one sees drawings as two- or three-dimensional? (On some accounts, sense-data are two-dimensional.)
- Can sense-data account for Gestalt-properties and -switches?

## Objections to the sense-datum theory: ontological

Sense-data are strange entities: They don't seem to be physical objects, neither are they located in physical space, but they appear to have spatial characteristics. They seem to have extension because we describe them using spatial language: the bit on the left is green, the bit on the right is red. We can even describe them as moving. But where in space do they exist?

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" (1968) 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" (Armstrong 1968: 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" (1977) replies to Armstrong that sense-data are not indeterminate and that the sense-datum theorist is only committed to (2), not to

(3) 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. Sense-data may have properties we are not aware of. But does this not turn sense-data into the *objects* of perception?

## Objections to the sense-datum theory: epistemological

Sense-data theories promote scepticism by interposing a 'veil' of sense-data between us and the world. When we perceive we are only aware of sense-data: how can we know of the existence of objects in the world?

Two responses available to sense-datum theorist:

1. Sense-datum theory does not suffer worse from scepticism than other theories (a 'tu quoque' type of response). Internalist epistemic theories hold that whether a subject knows something is accessible via reflection to the subject (this is an instance of what is known as the KK principle: If you know something, you know that you know it). External epistemic theories (e.g. reliabilism) hold that whether you know something depends on factors 'outside of your control', e.g. on whether you have used a reliable process (but you don't need to know that the process is reliable in order to gain knowledge).
  - Internalists face the same sceptical worries than the sense-datum theorists because they must admit that nothing allows them to determine whether they are perceiving or hallucinating, so for them perception cannot imply knowledge. So what else is needed?
  - Externalists say e.g. that perceiving provides knowledge because it is a reliable method. Sense-datum theorists, however, can make same move: Directly seeing sense-data sometimes constitutes indirect perception of the world. When this happens I perceive and this is a reliable process.
2. Sense-datum theorists can appeal to the hypo-deductive model of explanation. The best explanation for the sense-data and the regularities in the patterns of sense-data is the existence of external objects causing sense data, which sense-data accurately represent.

## Mark Johnston, The Obscure Object of Hallucination (2004)

Johnston's 2004 article may be read as challenging, perhaps rejecting **Pr**.

**Thesis:** the argument from hallucination is compatible with naive realism if the distinction between perceptions and hallucinations is not drawn in terms of perceptions being hallucinations 'augmented' by indirect objects of visual awareness.

**Disjunctivism**, the denial of an "act of awareness common to cases of hallucination and seeing" (2004: 121) is one, but not the only way of doing so. We may also postulate a common factor that does not make for 'direct' objects.

### **A first-order account of the objects of seeing and hallucination:**

- Hallucination, as a “distinctive kind of mental act” (2004: 127) admits of a act/object analysis, and we can demonstratively think about its objects.
- Hallucination cannot be a source of original *de re* thought about particulars (or sensible kinds), but is instead parasitic on antecedent singular reference (2004: 129). Within limits, who it is one is hallucinating is determined by whom one immediately takes it to be (2004: 132).
- Hallucination, in contrast, does provide for original *de re* knowledge of qualities: “One can come to know what “supersaturated” red is like only by afterimagining it.” (2004: 130, cf. also 2004: 141–142)

Best explanation of this facts:

- The *primary* object of hallucination is a sensible profile (2004: 134), a “manner[...] of presentation that [is] [itself] presented in sensing” (2004: 141), which is a structural property 2004: 147.
- The *secondary* object is determined by how the primary object immediately strikes us as of or about or by what the hallucination is anchored in.
- The two objects can exist independently (we may be dwelling on an array of visible qualities).

The **common factor** between hallucinations and corresponding veridical seeings are the items suited to be the primary objects of hallucinations (2004: 133). The primary objects stands to the secondary in the relation of type to token:

...the objects of hallucination and the objects of seeing are in a certain way akin; the first are complexes of sensible qualities and relations while the second are spatio-temporal particulars instantiating such complexes. (2004: 135)

The structure of qualities that one might hallucinate is in fact a proper part of the more demanding sensible profile that one is aware of in a corresponding case of seeing. (2004: 136–137)

This is not a version of the Conjunctive Analysis (which would make it vulnerable to the argument from hallucination), because the sensible profile is not the ‘direct’ object of visual awareness, but rather what the direct object of perception is seen as:

In seeing Lucca as an Italian greyhound sitting under the desk I am aware of Lucca instantiating a certain sensible profile. Structure and merely qualitative parts of that same sensible profile can also be given to me in hallucination, but there is no sense in which they are given to me more directly than Lucca is when I see her. (2004: 137)

**Advantage 1:** By construing the relation between the respective objects of seeing and hallucination in terms of part/whole (or rather material constitution, 2004: 139), rather than direct/indirect, this view undercuts the picture that seeing occurs *only* at the end of a causal process:

Seeing is an environment-revealing mental act that is materially constituted by a physical process that subtends the revealed environment. In this way, seeing is more than the solitary work of the visual system, or, indeed, of the whole brain. Seeing goes all the way out to the things seen, the things with which it acquaints the subject. (2004: 139)

The mind never faces the challenge of connecting to external particulars from the impoverished position of intercourse merely with items that one could anyway hallucinate. (2004: 150)

This also justifies our rejection of the ‘Phenomenal Bottleneck Principle’ (akin to Robinson’s ‘Phenomenal Principle’) (2004: 152–153) and explains how we see the back of things (2004: 154).

**Advantage 2:** By construing the secondary objects of hallucination as the things that we mention to explain how the primary objects strike us, we inherit some advantages of the intentionalist view and can explain the Waterfall Illusion, contrary to Adverbialism (2004: 144, cf. also 2004: 179–180)

**Advantage 3:** Our visual awareness of sensible profiles explains why the particular kind of authority we have for our immediate perceptual judgments.

**Advantage 4:** Because sensible profiles are themselves objects of *sensory* awareness even though they occur in seeing-as, which is a deployment of a conceptual ability, the conceptual / non-conceptual content dichotomy is a false one.

**Advantage 5:** No need for non-existent ‘intentional objects’. Sensible profiles, appealed to from within an intensional context, fit the bill. (Postulating non-existent objects cannot anyway account for the mind-dependency of intentional objects, cf. 2004: 163–64.)

## Adverbialism

Adverbialism may be construed as challenging **P2**. Other construals are possible too. According to Crane (2005: 13),

Some philosophers [he cites Ducasse (1968) and Chisholm (1957)] agree with the Phenomenal Principle that whenever a sensory quality appears to be instantiated then it is instantiated, but deny that this entails the existence of sense-data. Rather, they hold that we should think of these qualities as modifications of the experience itself. Hence when someone has an experience of something brown, something like brownness is instantiated, but in the experience itself, rather in its object. This is not to say that the experience is brown, but rather that the experience is modified in a certain way, the way we can call “perceiving brownly”. The canonical descriptions of perceptual experiences, then, employ adverbial modifications of the perceptual verbs: instead of describing an experience as someone’s “visually sensing a brown square”, the theory says that they are “visually sensing brownly and squarely”.

Adverbialists of all types have to face the “many properties problem” raised by Frank Jackson (1975). We clearly distinguish

- a perception of a square as red and of a circle as green; from
- a perception of a square as green and of a circle as red.

The adverbialist, however, analyses them both as

- sensing square-ly and red-ly and circle-ly and greenly,

hence cannot make an important distinction. What way is there for the adverbialist to make this distinction without re-introducing red and square objects into the story?

Compare the two incompatible:

- possibly being 1.5 m tall;
- possibly being 2 m tall.

with the two compatible:

- having a mother who possibly is 1.5 m tall;
- having a father who possibly is 2m tall.

or with the two equally compatible

- having a mother who possibly is 1.5 m tall;
- having a mother who possibly is 2m tall.

A possible way out for the adverbialist is to allow for ‘higher-order adverbial modification’, as in “James Bond, freshly captured, cleverly stammered stupidly to his interrogators” (Clark 1989: 199).

## Perspectival Facts

Perception, according to a popular and plausible view, puts us into direct contact with objects in our surroundings. According to this natural realist view, tendentiously called “naïve”, perception is a two-place relation between a perceiving subject and the object of the perceptual act. ‘Naïve’ realism, however, faces a number of obstacles. What we see, for one thing, depends on where we are: the visible shape of the round cup in front of me, for example, is oval and changes with my position with respect to it. This so-called “argument from perspective” is the strongest argument in favour of sense-data, which are incompatible with direct realism:

- 1 Every intentional object is either existentially independent from its intentional acts, or dependent on it (in which case we call it a “sense-datum”)
- 2 Oval and round are contrary properties.
- 3 A same cup can look round from certain point of views, and elliptical from certain other ones.
- ∴ Therefore, at least one of these points of view does not present us with a mind-independent property of the cup, but with a mind-dependent sense-datum.
- 4 There is no reason to privilege one point of view over another.
- ∴ Therefore, we are always presented with sense-data.

The best objection to the argument from perspective is that premise **3** is ambiguous between

3' A same cup can look *round* from certain points of view, and *elliptical* from certain other ones.

3" A same cup can look *round from certain points of view* and *elliptical from certain other ones*.

The argument from perspective does not rule out the reading 3", and 3" does not lead to its conclusion for *round a from certain point of view* and *elliptical from another one* are not incompatible properties. So the argument is a non-sequitur. Objects of perception are things from a certain point of view, i.e. perspectival facts. The points of view accounting for their perspectivity are not the perceptual acts, nor are they modes of presentation of the object (if there is one): they are located on the 'object side' as it were. One nice consequence of this account is that once we integrate the point of view into the object of the experience, the reference to ellipses appears unnecessary for capturing the difference between the objects of the two experiences. The best description of the phenomenological fact motivating 3 is, we submit, the following one:

3''' A same cup can look *round from certain points of view* and *round from certain other ones*.

What about ellipses then? According to the position we endorse, nothing appears elliptical in the veridical perception of a cup. The cup always appears round from here or there. To appear round from here means that the cup appears to be at a certain *distance* and *orientation* from the given point of view. Orientation is reducible to relative distance of parts: the orientation of the cup changes from a point of view to another iff the ratio of distances between each part and the point of view changes. For instance, from some points of view (right above of the cup), all the parts of the edge are at equal distance from the point of view; while for some other points of view (from the side of the cup), there are parts of the edge that are closer to the point of view than other ones. These ratios, however, should not be confused with the ratios among the parts of the edge themselves: they are all at the same distance of each other, and appear to be so in the perceptual experience.

Ellipses then are just artifacts from painters that project three-dimensional oriented objects on two dimensional vertically oriented screens. When we adopt the attitude of the painter, we create an illusion from a perception: we change the orientation and shape of the perceptual objects. We change the relative distances of the edges of the cup to the point of view, thereby creating the illusion of having an elliptical object in view.

What account for the phenomenological difference between the two experiences is the difference in the points of view, integrated into the two perspectival facts. One might think that this implies the reality of sense-data it was intended to disprove. In claiming that perceptual objects are point-of-view dependent, we seem to imply that they are mind-dependent. What's bred in the bone comes out in the flesh. Fortunately, it does not.

Perspectival facts are not sense data, but are 'out there', full citizens of the mind-independent external world. They are not parts or aspects of the experiencing subject and they exist independently of experiencing subjects. They are perspectival only in that they contain a perspectivally 'modulated' property, 'modulated' by its being relational with respect to a point of view.

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