

Disjunctivism and Causality

Seminar 'Das Problem der Wahrnehmung', Philipp Blum

October 9, 2014

What is disjunctivism?

Different characterisations of disjunctivism:

- There is no experiential mental kind that characterize both cases of veridical perception and cases of illusion or hallucination.
- There is no common element to veridical and illusionary / hallucinatory veridical experiences (Hinton 1973).
- Look-statements have different truthmakers in the two cases (Snowdon 1990: 56-57).
- Statements about how things appear do not report a mental event or state common to both veridical and non-veridical perceptual experiences Martin (2004: 271).
- Appearance statements are shorthand for disjunctive reports, "not the description[s] of a kind of mental act common to hallucination and seeing" (Johnston 2004: 214).
- Perceptions essentially depend on their objects Martin (2006: 361).

Succinctly, disjunctivists like Alston (1999), Campbell (2002), Fish (2009), Hinton (1973), Langsam (1997), Snowdon (1981), Martin (2006), seek to defend naïve realism by disputing the 'generalizing step' in the argument from illusion and from hallucination.

Disjunctivists stress that, even if veridical perceptions and their corresponding hallucinations can be sometimes subjectively indistinguishable from each other, this does not logically imply that they have to be type-identical mental states (Martin 2004, 2006). This manoeuvre is supposed to allow disjunctivists to block the argument from illusion and from hallucination (cf. Smith 2002: ch. 1).

Campbell (2002: 116), Fish (2009: 14), Martin (1997: 83-84) claim that mind-independent physical objects constitute and, hence, determine the phenomenal character of the subject's perceptual experience, at least in part.

M.G.F. Martin, *The Limits of Self-Awareness* (2004)

Thesis: the burden of proof lies with the opponent of disjunctivism.

Argument:

- P₁** To believe that the burden of proof lies with the disjunctivist, is to take (introspective) indiscernibility to be central.
- P₂** To take indiscernibility to be central, is to advocate disjunctivism.
- C** Hence, the belief that the burden of proof lies with the disjunctivist is self-defeating.

Broader aim: in arguing for **P₂**, to make it plausible that there may hallucinations be "sensory states whose mental nature is characterisable in nothing but epistemological terms, in terms of their unknowable difference from cases of veridical perception" (2004: 38).

Positive argument for disjunctivism: It solves the following inconsistent triad, by denying **3**:

- 1** Naïve Realism: sense experience is non-representational, but (?) relational and hence (?) object-dependent.
- 2** Experiential Naturalism: any sense experience has sufficient physical and psychological causes.
- 3** Common Kind Assumption: any sense experience can also occur while hallucinating.

Elaboration of P₁: The "first [immodest] conception of experience" holds that we are introspectively aware of the characteristic features of visual experience being independent of its being a perception. But this is too strong: all introspection really affords is that the characteristic features seem to us to be present in the case of hallucination (this is the modest account). To make the stronger claim, assumes (in my terms)

that the characteristic features not only are luminous (i.e. whenever we have an experience having them, we are automatically aware that the experience has them) but also 'detectable' (i.e. whenever we have an experience lacking them, we are automatically aware that the experience lacks them)

Elaboration of P₂: Disjunctivists have to explain *why* hallucinations are indiscernible from perceptions. The difficulty is not solved by admitting that what is present in hallucinations is present in perceptions, but we also have to say what is present in perceptions that is absent in hallucinations. We do not have to do so by postulating a second experience in perception, but can instead appeal to essential properties of perceptions not shared by hallucinations:

What is distinctive of the rejection of the Common Kind Assumption is the thought that the most fundamental kind that the perceptual event is of, the kind in virtue of which the event has the nature that it does, is one which couldn't be instanced in the case of hallucination. (2004: 60)

To show that these essential properties of perceptions are not explanatorily redundant, we need to recognise that even hallucinations *seemingly* have these essential, relational and object-involving properties. This character of hallucinations, of seeming to be perceptions, is in turn explained in terms of indiscriminability (2004: 68). But this means that the explanatory potential of seeming to be a perception (being indiscriminable from an *F*) is dependent on the explanatory potential of being a perception (2004: 70):

The notion common to perception and hallucination, that of sensory experience, lacks explanatory autonomy from that of veridical perception. And isn't this just what we express by saying that either this is a case of veridical perception, in which case certain consequences follow, or it is merely one of being indiscriminable from such a perception, in virtue of which of which certain other consequences follow? (2004: 73)

Potential problem: Indiscernibility is individuum- and species-specific. Solution: idealization. (Worry: is this compatible with non-transitivity? Compare Williamson: there is always, and for everyone, a margin of error or other, without there being one margin of error for always and everyone).

Simple causal theories

Analysis of the seeing relation

Grice's clock case:

...it is logically conceivable that there should be some method by which an expert could make it look to X as if there were a clock on the shelf on occasions where the shelf was empty: there might be some apparatus by which X's cortex could be suitably stimulated, or some technique analogous to post-hypnotic suggestion. If such treatment were applied to X on an occasion when there actually was a clock on the shelf, and if X's impressions were found to continue unchanged when the clock was removed or its position altered, then I think we should be inclined to say that X did not see the clock that was before his eyes. (Grice 1961: 142)

Lewis' brain before the eyes:

The Brain before the Eyes: I hallucinate at random (thus the experience is caused by my brain) and seem to see a brain before my eyes which perfectly matches (purely accidentally) my own brain. However, my brain is before my eyes—it has been removed from my skull and all nerves (etc.) have been stretched somehow. In this case, the first condition of the analysis is met: I have a visual experience as of a brain before my eyes. So is the second condition: this experience is satisfied as there is a brain before my eyes. And so is the final condition: my having this experience was caused by the brain before my eyes. As all three conditions are met, our analysis would count this as a case in which I see the brain before my eyes. That doesn't seem right. (Fish 2010: 115)

Tye's Tom and Tim:

Although I cannot see it, I am standing facing a mirror angled so I see an area to my right. Behind the mirror, and therefore hidden from my view, stands robot Tim. Away to my right,

hidden behind a wall, stands Tim's left-right inverted robot twin, Tom, who is facing the mirror. Robot Tom is therefore reflected in the mirror such that the image I see is of a robot which looks just like Tim would if the mirror were to be removed. Now, Tom is wired up so that all his movements are caused by Tim's movements—the only reason he is standing where he is is because Tim is standing where he is. And any movements Tim makes are copied (but left-right inverted)—if Tim waves his right hand, then Tom waves his left hand, and the mirror image of Tom “waves its right hand.” [...] The phenomenological features of my experience are counterfactually dependent upon Tim—if he moves, Tom will move and my experience will change accordingly. As all four conditions are met, Lewis's revised analysis would count this as a case in which I see robot Tim. Yet although all the conditions of this analysis of seeing are met, our intuitions remain that it is Tom, not Tim, whom I see. (Fish 2010: 117–118)

Determination of perceptual content

Views about the content of perception (common to veridical perception and hallucination)

1. generality view (McGinn 1982; Davies 1992): $REP(\exists xPx)$ – cannot account for the particularity of perception;
2. Searle (1981) (in 1991, he says it's about the satisfaction conditions, not the truth conditions which the former determine): $REP(\exists xPx \wedge Rse)$ – too cognitively demanding Burge (1991);
3. the demonstrative view Bach (2007) Tye (2007) – but what is the 'demonstration'?

Soteriou's shifting case:

Soteriou (2000) augments this appeal with an argument. He asks us to consider a subject wearing displacing glasses that shift the apparent location of objects rightwards, such that objects to the left of the subject look directly in front, objects directly in front of the subject look off to the right, and so on. Now imagine we have a red ball (A) placed to the subject's left such that the action of the displacing glasses makes it look as though there is a red ball in front of the subject. As things stand, the content of this experience is false. Yet we can make it true by adding a further, indiscriminable red ball (B), directly in front of the subject. Now there is a red ball in front of the subject, just as the experience represents there to be. (Fish 2010: 92–93)

Higher orders to the rescue?

The intuitive idea is that, in perceptual experience, a person is simply presented with the actual constituents of the physical world themselves. Any errors in her world view which result are the product of the subject's responses to this experience, however automatic, natural, or understandable in retrospect these responses may be. Error, strictly speaking, given how the world actually is, is never an essential feature of experience itself. (Brewer 2006: 169)

Compare and Contrast with Emotions

Main assumptions: “Emotions are often not directed at propositions, they are episodes, they have a salient experiential dimension, their phenomenology is best captured in terms of bodily feelings, and it is in virtue of their phenomenology that emotions relate to evaluative properties.” ... “the emotionally relevant bodily changes are experienced as distinct stances we adopt towards specific objects.” ... “the subject experiences her body holistically as taking an attitude towards a certain object...” ... “in emotions, these sensations are typically aspects of a whole pattern that constitutes a world-directed attitude.” (Deonna et al. 2012: 79)

The relation of emotion to action: “emotions are intimately connected with types of action readiness or, more precisely, felt action readiness. ... involving awareness of one's body adopting a specific stance towards an object or being poised to act in given ways in relation to an object, one that sheds light on the idea that emotions make us apprehend the world in evaluative terms.” (Deonna et al. 2012: 80)

Their specific proposal: “emotions constitute evaluative attitudes [insofar as they are] experiences of our body as ready or poised to act in various ways towards an object. ... what we feel happens in our body constitutes in itself an emotional attitude. Emotions are not attitudes we take towards our felt body, but felt bodily attitudes directed towards the world.” (Deonna et al. 2012: 80)

Key Examples: “Fear of the dog is an experience of the dog as dangerous, precisely because it consists in feeling the body's readiness to act so as to diminish the dog's likely impact on it...” ... “Admiration is an

experience of a given object as admirable, because it consists in feeling the way one's body opens up to sustained and expanding exploration of the object, and it is correct if and only if the object is admirable." (Deonna et al. 2012: 81)

References

- Alston, William P., 1999. Back to the Theory of Appearing. In Tomberlin, James E. (editor) *Philosophical Perspectives 13: Epistemology*, pp. 181–203. Oxford: Basil Blackwell Publishers.
- Bach, Kent, 2007. Knowledge, Wine and Taste: what good is knowledge (in enjoying wine)? In Smith, Barry C. (editor) *Questions of Taste: The Philosophy of Wine*, pp. 21–40. Oxford: Signal Books.
- Brewer, Bill, 2006. Perception and Content. *European Journal of Philosophy* 14(2): 165–181. Reprinted in Lindgaard (2008: 15–31).
- Burge, Tyler, 1991. Vision and Intentional Content. In LePore, Ernest & Robert van Gulick (editors) *John Searle And His Critics*, pp. 195–214. Oxford: Basil Blackwell Publishers.
- Byrne, Alex & Heather Logue (editors), 2009. *Disjunctivism: Contemporary Readings*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press.
- Campbell, John A., 2002. *Reference and Consciousness*. Oxford Cognitive Science Series, Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Davies, Martin Kinsey, 1992. Perceptual Content and Local Supervenience. *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 92: 21–45.
- Davis, Stephen (editor), 1983. *Causal Theories of Mind*. Berlin: Springer Verlag.
- Deonna, Julien Amos, Raffaele Rodogno & Fabrice Teroni, 2012. *In Defense of Shame. The Faces of an Emotion*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Fish, William, 2009. *Perception, Hallucination, and Illusion*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Fish, William, 2010. *Philosophy of Perception. A Contemporary Introduction*. Routledge Contemporary Introductions to Philosophy, London: Routledge.
- Grice, H. Paul, 1961. The Causal Theory of Perception. *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society, Supplementary Volume* 35: 121–152. Reprinted in Davis (1983) and Grice (1989: 224–247).
- Grice, H. Paul, 1989. *Studies in the Way of Words*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press.
- Hinton, J.M., 1973. *Experiences: An Inquiry into Some Ambiguities*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Johnston, Mark, 2004. The Obscure Object of Hallucination. *Philosophical Studies* 120(1–3): 113–183.
- Langsam, Harold, 1997. The Theory of Appearing Defended. *Philosophical Studies* 87(1): 33–59.
- Lewis, David K., 1980. Veridical Hallucination and Prosthetic Vision. *Australasian Journal of Philosophy* 58: 239–49. Reprinted, with a postscript (Lewis 1986b), in Lewis (1986a: 273–286).
- Lewis, David K., 1986a. *Philosophical Papers*, volume 2. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Lewis, David K., 1986b. Postscript to Lewis (1980). In Lewis (1986a), pp. 287–290.
- Lindgaard, Jakob (editor), 2008. *John McDowell: Experience, Norm, and Nature*. European Journal of Philosophy Book Series, Oxford: Basil Blackwell Publishing.
- Martin, M.G.F., 1997. The Reality of Appearances. In Sainsbury, Richard Mark (editor) *Thought and Ontology*, pp. 81–106. Milano: Franco Angeli.
- Martin, M.G.F., 2004. The Limits of Self-Awareness. *Philosophical Studies* 120(1–3): 37–89.
- Martin, M.G.F., 2006. On Being Alienated. In Gendler, Tamar Szabó & John Hawthorne (editors) *Perceptual Experience*, pp. 354–410. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- McGinn, Colin, 1982. *The Character of Mind*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Searle, John R., 1981. Analytic Philosophy and Mental Phenomena. In French, Peter A., Theodore E. Uehling, Jr. & Howard K. Wettstein (editors) *Midwest Studies in Philosophy 6: Foundations of Analytic Philosophy*, pp. 405–424. Minneapolis, Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press.
- Searle, John R., 1991. *Pour réitérer les différences*. Paris: Éditions de l'Éclat.
- Smith, A.D., 2002. *The Problem of Perception*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press.
- Snowdon, Paul F., 1981. Perception, Vision, and Causation. *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 81: 175–192. Reprinted in Byrne & Logue (2009: 33–48).
- Snowdon, Paul F., 1990. The objects of perceptual experience. *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society, Supplementary Volume* 64: 121–150. Reprinted in Byrne & Logue (2009: 49–74).
- Soteriou, Matthew, 2000. The Particularity of Visual Perception. *European Journal of Philosophy* 8(2): 173–189.
- Tye, Michael, 1982. A Causal Analysis of Seeing. *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 42: 311–325.
- Tye, Michael, 2007. Intentionalism and the Argument from No Common Content. In Hawthorne, John (editor) *Philosophical Perspectives 21: Philosophy of Mind*, pp. 598–613. Oxford: Basil Blackwell Publishers.