

Seeing-as and ephemeral percepta

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Taking recent discussions of the epistemology of evaluative and ‘emotional’ judgments as my starting-point, I investigate whether a adverbialist account of seeing-as can assuage some of the metaphysical worries people have raised about ephemeral or ‘non-canonical’ objects of perception such as flames, soap-bubbles, glimmers, highlights, reflections, echoes, shivers, atmospheric phenomena like rainbows and mirages, shadows, after-images, constellations, affordances and values.

I argue against Deonna et al. (2012) and the orthodoxy in the emotion literature, and in favour of Mulligan (2007 2009), that seeing-as allows us to capture the way evaluative judgments and appropriate emotions are justified by perceptions, characterising both judgments and emotions as reactions to such seeings-as. They are reactions, however, not just to the objects directly perceived, but to these objects-as-exemplifying some property.

In seeings-as, “the third argument of ‘see as’ attributes to a subject a non-conceptual way of seeing what the second argument refers to” (Mulligan 1999: 125): the “as” clause is a adverbial modification of the act of seeing. I defend this construal against the standard anti-adverbialist arguments. Individuating objects of seeing-as as manifestations, I argue, allows for both an ontologically plausible construal of the entities concerned, as for the ‘right’ logical relations among the ways they are seen. By distinguishing between the intentional and representational properties of seeing-as, we can explain why to undergo an emotion is indeed to stand in an intentional relation to value, but the relation is not belief nor does it involve any representation (thought) of value (Mulligan 2007: 209-210).

I then consider applications to other types of perception. Not just seeing-as involving axiological properties, but also other types of perceptions do not represent their correctness conditions, even though they represent (conceptually) their satisfaction conditions. What it means to have correctness conditions is to be governed by certain norms. For perception, e.g., the norm is two-fold: that the world be such how the experience represents it to be; and: that the experience should not occur if the world is not like this. The perception is under this norm because it is a reason to believe.

Because we account for the ephemeral or non-canonical objects in terms of seeing-as, we may characterise them as manifestations, in virtue of the perception of which we perceive the things they are manifestations of, avoiding postulating necessary connections between distinct existences.

Problem 1: Sounds and Scruton’s ‘secondary objects’

According to Roger Scruton, sounds are “secondary objects, which is to say objects whose nature and properties are determined by how they appear to the person of normal hearing” (2009b: 5, cf. also 1997: 6 and 2009a: 59) and “‘pure events’, things that happen, but which don’t happen *to* anything” (2009b: 5), “in which no individual substances participate, and which therefore *becomes* the individual object of our thought and attention” (1997: 12). Such a pure event “does not happen to anything (except perhaps to itself” and “cannot be reduced to changes undergone by reidentifiable particulars” (2009a: 61) but contain within themselves the principles whereby they can be ordered (2009b: 64). Because the events that are sounds are pure, they are secondary: “being unencumbered by objects, [...] sounds come to us their nature fully revealed” (2009b: 25). Secondary objects are thus “like secondary qualities in that their nature is bound up with the way they are perceived” but which are “objects in their own right, bearers of properties, and identifiable separately both from the things that emit them and the places where they are located” (2009b: 20, cf. 1997: 3). He also says that a secondary object is one “all whose properties are ways in which it appears” (Scruton 2009b: 23) and that secondary objects are “defined phenomenologically” (Scruton 2009a: 50), mentioning rainbows and smells as other examples.

Problem 1: What *are* sounds?

Problem 2: The argument from perspective

The argument from perspective against so-called ‘naïve realism’: 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.

- 1 Every intentional object is either existentially independent from its intentional acts, or dependent on it (in which case it is called 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.

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The argument from perspective does not rule out the reading 3”, and on that reading, the conclusion does not follow, since *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 perspectivalness are not the perceptual acts, nor are they modes of presentation of the object (if there any such): they are located on the ‘object side’ as it were. One appealing 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, I submit, the following one:

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

Problem 2: What are such looks?

Problem 3: Affective knowledge of value

Cognitivists accept

- (1) x regrets that $p \rightarrow (x$ correctly regrets that p iff it is regrettable that $p)$

“Friends of correctness conditions” (Rabinowicz & Rønnow-Rasmussen, Skorupski, Scanlon, Mulligan) subscribe to

- (2) If x correctly regrets that p , then $(x$ correctly regrets that p because it is regrettable that $p)$

while buck-passers or neo-sentimentalists combine (??) with

- (3) If it is regrettable that p , then $(it$ is regrettable that p because $(x$ regrets that $p \rightarrow x$ correctly regrets that $p))$

The problem of buck-passing theories of value is that it gets the explanatory direction wrong: the Evil Demon who inflicts pain unless I prefer the saucer of mud makes my preferring it valuable, but does not make eating the saucer of mud valuable.

They also cannot explain why affective knowledge of value can motivate:

“Suppose with the neo-sentimentalist that being valuable is understood in terms of appropriate emotions or good, undefeated reasons to feel emotions. What, then, would knowledge of the value of an object amount to? [...] presumably a neo-sentimentalist must hold that we sometimes have knowledge of the appropriateness of an emotion. And in the most basic cases this could only be knowledge that an emotion is appropriate, that there are undefeated reasons to feel an emotion. But if we have knowledge of values it is extremely implausible to think that such knowledge consists only of knowledge that, a knowledge by description which has no anchorage in any knowledge by acquaintance. On one common and plausible view, knowledge that p cannot motivate; even axiolog-

ical knowledge, knowledge that it is valuable that p , is an intellectual state and, like all such states, cannot motivate. Feeling (dis)values, however, is no intellectual state and can motivate.” (Mulligan 2007: 225)

On Mulligan’s alternative account, emotions are reactions to feelings of value:

“Suppose that Maria is walking down the street and observes a scene in which bread is being distributed unequally to equally needy children. She is struck, as we say, by the injustice of the situation. She has felt the injustice of the situation[.] Perhaps she reacts with indignation. Perhaps she is suffering from indignation fatigue and feels no emotion whatsoever.” (Mulligan 2007: 223)

Because emotions are reactions to feelings of values, they not only have motivational force but may also be justified by perception. My fear of the dog is justified not just by its dangerousness (which is circular if its dangerousness consists in fear being appropriate), but also by my sensation of its dangerousness, which is not a representation of danger, but rather a perception of the dog as dangerous.

Problem 3: What is seen in the perception of the dog as dangerous?

A false start: supervenience

In application to the first problem, we get what Armstrong (1997: 12,45) calls “the doctrine of the ontological free lunch”: that lesser (in Armstrong’s terminology: supervenient) entities are grounded in (in Armstrong: necessitated by) their basis, and therefore, in one sense at least, are ‘nothing over and above’ them, while still being numerically different from them. But nothing can both be a free lunch and not exist.

In application to the second problem, we get subjectivism, ie. that my perception of the coin as round is (partly) grounded in me and thus cannot be shared.

In application to the third problem, we may distinguish, as Deonna et al. (2012: 97) do, between the natural properties the subject is aware of in virtue of his being in the mental state which is the cognitive base of the emotion (a perception for example) and the axiological properties that figure in the correctness conditions of the emotion, and hold that (the perception of) the first justify (the reaction to) the second. This, however, gets the direction of explanation wrong (again): it is only because an exemplification of these natural properties is (in this instance) an exemplification of dangerousness that

Another false start: response-dependence

The notion of response-dependence was introduced by Mark Johnston (1989) as a generalisation of the notion of secondary qualities . Johnston (1989: 145) characterises it as follows (the requirement that the “basic equation”, i.e. the biconditional, is necessarily is not present in Johnston’s original criterion, but clearly needed and commonly added in the literature):

A predicate F is response-dependent iff there are ‘substantial’ specifications of S , C and R such that it is necessary and a priori that, for all x , “ x is F ” is true iff x has the disposition to produce in all of S a mental response R under conditions C

There are (at least) two problems with this as a solution to our problems: first, it is a classification of *predicates*, and second, there are ‘basic equations’ for all (Pettit 1990 1991) or at least all basic concepts (Pettit 1998: 113).

Representation of x as F is representation of x -as- F

Representational properties, being intrinsic, are not had in virtue of things outside the entities that have them. They are relational, however, in two ways: in virtue of reaching out to their direct objects, if any, and in virtue of being representations of these objects *as* such and such. It is this second feature, representation-as, which accounts for perspectivity. The content-conditions for representation-as have a two-fold structure: To represent something a as F , I must be *appropriately related* to a external item (a proposition, a state of affairs, a perceptual situation, an object, a plan) and my standing in this

relation to the external item must be an appropriate *reaction* to it (serious, non-lucky, veridical, non-perverse, not practically irrational). The appropriateness of the reaction is thus the joint outcome of two factors:

- it must be caused by (and justifiable in terms of) an appropriate *cognitive base*, which is directed at the representational / direct objects and represents them as being a certain way;
- it must be accompanied by an *affective feeling* that is the right kind of reaction to the right kind of intentional / formal object.

The two factors are intertwined in that the intentional object is the representational object as perceived a certain way.

While this of course needs much more detail, there is I think some promise it will help us solve the three problems:

1. If auditory perception is the perception of vibrating objects as emitting sounds, we reconcile the conflicting desiderata that sounds have an event-like character but have properties which are not determined by their causes in the way properties of events are inherited from properties of their participants.
2. The cup-as-round-from-here and the cup-as-round-from-there are real mind-independent objects (and there to appear to perceiving subjects), even though they constitutively involve a perspective.
3. The dog-as-dangerous motivates and justifies the reaction of fear.

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