

Knowledge and Reality, Lecture 19

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11/7/22

Experience

Inference and Rationality

Two Arguments against Rationality of Perception

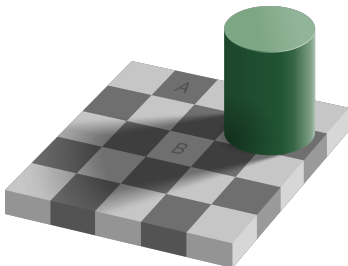
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Big Question		

Is experience sensitive to background beliefs, skills, or dispositions?

Experience ●○○○○○○○○○○○○○○○○○○○○	Inference and Rationality ○○○○○○○○○	Two Arguments against Rationality of Perception ○○○○○○○○○○○○○○○○○○○○
Argument from Illusion		

Here is one reason to think that it is not.

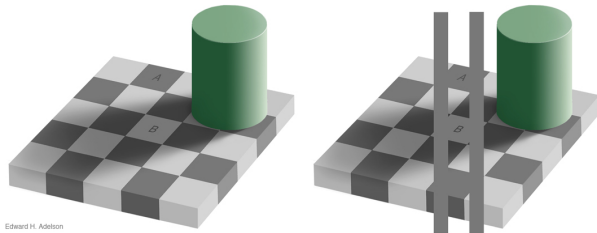
- We see illusions the way they are 'meant' to be seen even when we know better.



Edward Adelson's checker-shadow illusion

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Checker Shadow		

1. The squares A and B are the same shade on the page.
2. They don't look that way!
3. They stay not looking that way even when you know better.



Showing that A and B are the same

Argument

1. If experience were penetrated by belief, then once we believed A and B were the same, they'd look the same.
2. They don't look the same, even once we know they are.
- C. So, experience isn't penetrated by belief

8/43

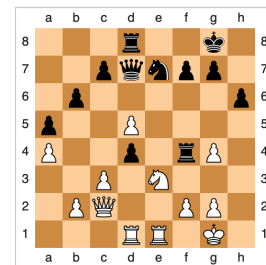
What's Wrong with this Argument

It just shows that a certain kind of penetration doesn't work.

- Lots of other ways for belief to affect experience other than that.

9/43

Memorisation Test



The position after move 22 in game 11 of 2021 World Championship

Two Empirical Claims

1. Expert chess players do much better at remembering that position after seeing it for a few seconds than the rest of us. (Not including you if you're an expert!)
2. They aren't *much* better at memorising boards where pieces are just randomly spread around a board.

11/43

Hypothesis

1. Chess players see the board as a game state, and hence remember it better.
2. That doesn't work for random distributions, except to the extent that some of the pieces fall into game-like distributions.

12/43

Stroop Effect

It's really hard – I mean *really* hard – to perceive words in languages you can read as anything other than words.

- On the next slide, say (to yourself) as quickly as possible the colors that each word is written in.

Blue
Brown
Green

Purple
Red
Yellow

Teal
Black
Pink

Let's try it again, with some rotations.

Red
Yellow
Teal

Black
Pink
Blue

Brown
Green
Purple

Hijacking

Typically, people who can read English will do worse on this than people who cannot.

- If you can read English, your perception of the words will hijack your color perception.
- Again, feels like something is getting in the way of perception.

Big Picture

- Something in background effects how things look.
- That effect is evaluable.
- If it is both bad for accuracy and not supported by evidence, it seems to make the perception itself irrational.

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Inference and Rationality

Two Arguments against Rationality of Perception

Siegel's Picture

1. Experiences are the product of (something like) inference.
2. The products of inference are assessable as rational/irrational.
- C. Experiences are assessable as rational/irrational.

Evaluating Inferences

- In theory, can ask about whether the premises are well-supported, and about whether the inference follows from the premises.
- In practice, hard to make this distinction out.
- Everyone who looks like they are reasoning in a way that doesn't follow could be implicitly believing "If premises, then conclusion."

Rational

Note that Siegel is explicitly using 'rational' and 'reasonable' as synonyms.

- This makes sense given their etymologies.
- Occasionally you do see them used as technical terms for different things, but I like Siegel's way of doing things.

"It is standard to call a belief "well-founded" if it has been formed and maintained epistemically well, and "ill-founded" if it has been formed or maintained epistemically badly. I follow standard usage, and tie it to my abstract uses of "rational" and "irrational" in the following way: a belief is ill-founded if it is formed or maintained irrationally, well-founded if it is formed and maintained rationally."

Bad Inquiry

One puzzle case.

- Detective makes silly choice about where to conduct inquiry, and thinks it will be good to conduct inquiries at Blank Slate.
- This is false - there is no evidence there.

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Two Arguments against Rationality of Perception

Bad Inquiry

Detective goes to Blank Slate, and sees that they have green tea ice cream for sale.

- Is this belief, that they have green tea ice cream, well-founded.
- Well, it was formed in an epistemically bad way - by going to the wrong place!
- But that's really not what Siegel means.

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Two Arguments against Rationality of Perception

Bad Inquiry

I think it's actually a little hard to say precisely what she does mean, but I get (and have appealed to, in this course) the general idea.

- If you believe p because you inferred it from a silly premise, it's not well-founded.
- And similar beliefs are also not well-founded.

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Inference and Rationality

Two Arguments against Rationality of Perception

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And that's going to feed into the picture of experience.

- Seeing something as a power tool, a phone, or a gun, isn't something that happens automatically, like seeing it as light or dark.
- It requires extra inputs, and those might be bad ones.

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Inference and Rationality

Two Arguments against Rationality of Perception

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Two Arguments against Rationality of Perception

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Inference and Rationality

Two Arguments against Rationality of Perception

Section 3.1

I want to end today's lecture with two arguments from section 3.1, about why one might think Siegel's argument is wrong, and experiences cannot be evaluated the way beliefs can.

1. Backward-looking;
2. Forward-looking.

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Two Arguments against Rationality of Perception

Backward-Looking

1. Experiences are formed passively.
 2. Beliefs are formed actively.
 3. Only actively formed states are assessable as rational or irrational.
- C. So beliefs, but not experiences, are assessable as rational or irrational.

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Two Arguments against Rationality of Perception

Siegel's Response

- Premise 2 is ambiguous.
- But on any plausible disambiguation, it is false.

31/43

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Two Arguments against Rationality of Perception

What Activity Might Be (1)

Activity might be phenomenological; we feel ourselves forming beliefs.

- But this only applies to a small fraction of our beliefs.
- And the ones it doesn't apply to are still capable of being rational or irrational.

32/43

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Two Arguments against Rationality of Perception

What Activity Might Be (2)

Activity might mean involving reasoning; our beliefs come from reasoning.

- Again, this is true for only a small fraction of our beliefs.
- You didn't reason to the conclusion that there are words on the screen now.
- But all beliefs, even the not-formed-by-reasoning ones, can be rational or irrational.

33/43

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Inference and Rationality

Two Arguments against Rationality of Perception

What Activity Might Be (3)

Activity might mean involving reflection.

- Even if you didn't reason to the belief that there are words on the screen, or in any sense *reflect* before forming that belief, you *could have* reflected on it.
- Maybe belief is active in that sense.

34/43

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Two Arguments against Rationality of Perception

What Activity Might Be (3)

But again, not everything can be reflective.

- Toddlers don't have this kind of capacity for reflection, but can have rational beliefs.

35/43

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Two Arguments against Rationality of Perception

Forward-Looking

1. Experiences cannot be adjusted.
 2. Beliefs can be adjusted.
 3. Being adjustable is necessary for being assessable for rationality.
- C. So beliefs, but not experiences, are assessable as rational.

36/43

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Two Arguments against Rationality of Perception

What Might Adjustable Mean Here

1. Subject to deliberation
2. Capable of being disowned
3. Change by habituation

37 / 43

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Two Arguments against Rationality of Perception

What Might Adjustable Mean (1)

If we mean that the believer can deliberate their way out of them, then delusional beliefs are not rational or irrational.

- But in fact they are irrational.
- NB: I'm not so sure here; some of the cases Siegel mentions (like Capgras) feel almost *arational*.

38 / 43

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Two Arguments against Rationality of Perception

What Might Adjustable Mean (2)

If we mean by adjustable that they can be disowned, this doesn't distinguish experience from belief.

- Experiences can be disowned.
- This isn't in the sense that you don't have them (again, think of the checker-shadow), but that you don't act on them.

39 / 43

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Inference and Rationality

Two Arguments against Rationality of Perception

What Might Adjustable Mean (2)

Note that this is a change from the previous 4 things we looked at.

- Now we're denying that experiences lack the property in question, rather than that beliefs have the property.

40 / 43

In the case of belief, ceasing to rely on a belief can't come apart from ceasing to have the belief.

- This doesn't seem right to me.
- A good juror can cease to rely on a belief from outside the court without ceasing to have it.
- There are hard questions here about what it means to rely on a belief, but they are practically significant.

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Inference and Rationality

Two Arguments against Rationality of Perception

What Might Adjustable Mean (3)

Maybe we can habituate ourselves into not forming beliefs a certain way.

- But it's even more plausible that we can habituate ourselves into not experiencing things a certain way.
- We can learn to hear an instrument as out of tune, to see a face as expressing a different emotion, and so on.

42 / 43

We'll move on to chapter 4