

Perception

LECTURE FOUR | MICHAELMAS 2018

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Last week

- ~~Lecture 1: Naive Realism~~
- ~~Lecture 2: The Argument from Hallucination~~
- ~~Lecture 3: Representationalism~~
- Lecture 4: Disjunctivism

Overview

- Discuss different philosophical views of the nature of perceptual experience
- Start with 'common sense' (Naive Realism). Then discuss objections by those who are impressed by various 'strange' experiences, such as illusions and hallucinations
- These objections have motivated:
 - Alternative theories of perception: Sense-Datum Theory, Representationalism/Intentionalism
 - **Theories that defend naive realism: Disjunctivism**

Arguments from hallucination

- “The common strategy of arguments from hallucination set out to show that certain things are true of hallucinations, and hence must be true of perceptions.” (Martin 2006)
- Both in its traditional form and in its causal form, the argument from hallucination relies on a common kind assumption (CKA)



The traditional argument revisited

1. HALLUCINATIONS are not presentations of mind-independent objects
2. HALLUCINATIONS and perceptions are experiences of the same fundamental kind (CKA)
3. Perceptions are not presentations of mind-independent objects

Sorts of kinds





Sorts of kinds

- The Common Kind Assumption must make use of a very specific notion of a kind: that of a fundamental kind
- Some notions of kinds will make CKA trivially true or trivially false. Take the following superficial understanding of kinds: *X and Y are of the same kind iff X and Y have some feature in common.*
- If HALLUCINATIONS and perceptions are experiences that are subjectively indistinguishable, then we know that HALLUCINATIONS and perceptions have the following feature in common: they are experiences that are subjectively indistinguishable from perceptions. So HALLUCINATIONS and perceptions are experiences of the same kind. Too easy!

Sorts of kinds

- Moreover, the superficial notion of a kind will also make HALLUCINATIONS and perceptions belong to different kinds
- Hallucinations are (say) abnormal experiences, while perceptions are not abnormal experiences. Hence, in a loose sense, they are different *kinds* of experiences.
- So it matters that we focus on the notion of a *fundamental kind*



Fundamental kinds

- Recall the distinction between ‘phase-sortals’ and ‘substance-sortals’: You merely happen to be a student (‘phase’); You are essentially an animal (‘substance’).
- You can lose the property of being a student and continue to exist, but cannot lose the property of being an animal and continue to exist. Being an animal is a substance kind to which you belong.
- Moreover, you are not just an animal, you are a *human* animal (*homo sapiens*). Being a human animal is the most specific substance kind to which you belong.
- A thing’s most specific substance kind is its fundamental kind.

The traditional argument revisited one more time

1. HALLUCINATIONS are not presentations of mind-independent objects
2. HALLUCINATIONS and perceptions are experiences of the same fundamental kind (CKA)
3. Perceptions are not presentations of mind-independent objects



Disjunctivism

Why believe CKA?

1. HALLUCINATIONS and perceptions are experiences that are subjectively indistinguishable experiences
2. **If two experiences are subjectively indistinguishable, then they are experiences of the same fundamental kind**
3. HALLUCINATIONS and perceptions are experiences of the same fundamental kind (CKA)

Austin's soap

- “If I am told that a lemon is generically different from a piece of soap, do I 'expect' that no piece of soap could look just like a lemon? Why should I?” (Austin 1964:52)
- What holds for objects of experience, holds for experience itself just as much



What does a failure to distinguish tell us about reality?

- It seems strange to assume, as a general rule, that a failure of an ability to distinguish must reveal something about *any kind* of sameness in reality
- So why think that the absence of an introspectively discernible difference between experiences implies that both experiences belong to the same fundamental kind?
- Simpler hypothesis: HALLUCINATIONS and perceptions have something in common that explains why we can't tell them apart, but this commonality does not capture the fundamental kind of perception



The traditional argument reversed

1. HALLUCINATIONS are not presentations of mind-independent objects
2. Perceptions are presentations of mind-independent objects
3. HALLUCINATIONS and perceptions are experiences of different fundamental kinds (\neg CKA)

‘Disjunctive evidence’

- Once again the discussion turns on a puzzle about how exactly things appear or seem to us. What conclusions about the world (in particular, the mind) can we draw on the basis of these appearances?
- Everyone agrees that in ordinary perception of a pig it at least seems to you as if you are presented with a pig
- But if HALLUCINATIONS are possible, it may be possible to have an experience in which it seems to you as if you are presented with a pig, while the experience is in fact not a perception of a pig
- All the introspective evidence allows us to conclude is that: either we are seeing a pig (good case), or it merely seems to us as if we’re seeing a pig (bad case)

VI.—VISUAL EXPERIENCES

By J. M. HINTON

I

ONE of the things we can say and think is :

(A) I see a flash of light : actual light, a photic flash.

Another is:

(B) I have an illusion of a flash of light: I do not see a photic flash,
but something is happening that to me is like seeing one.

This is true, for instance, when I am given such an illusion by
passing an electric current through my brain.

A third thing we can say and think is :

(A \vee B) Either I see a flash of light, or I have an illusion of a
flash of light.

Nothing stops us from introducing some sentence as a more
compact way of saying this. It might be

(A \vee B)' I see a flash, or

It is to me as if I saw a flash of light, or
I seem to see a flash of light,

though no doubt these sentences can also be used in other ways.

Disjunctivism about perception

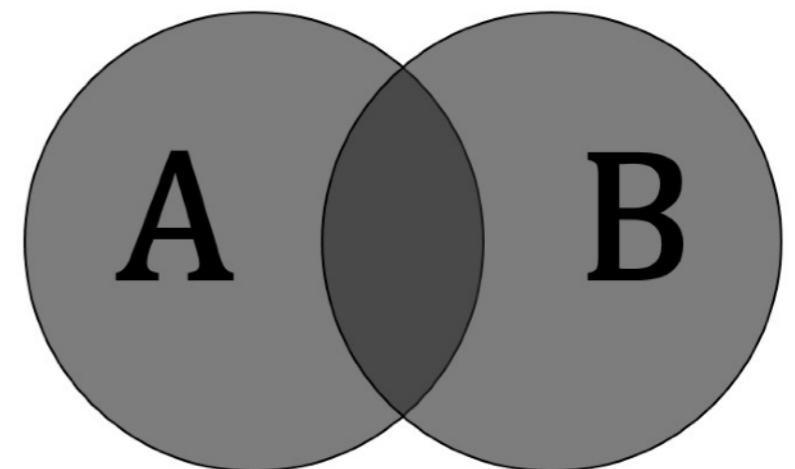
- “Hinton’s strategy is to argue that there is no good reason to think that these disjunctive statements could not do all the work that our normal talk of appearances and experience do. That is, that there is no good reason from our ordinary ways of talking to suppose that we are committed to the existence of some special kind of experiential event which may be present equally in cases of perception and hallucination.” (Martin 2006: 362)
- We have no reason to suppose that there are in addition ‘visual experiences’ (‘a common mental core’) which occur in both cases: hallucinations don’t tell us anything about what perception is fundamentally.

Does this
avoid the
screening off
problem?



Remaining worries

- Although the disjunctivist theory undermines the traditional argument from hallucination, it doesn't seem to undermine the causal argument
- The screening off problem for Naive Realism arises because the kind of experience we have when we HALLUCINATE 'gets in the way' when we have an experience of the fundamental kind that belongs to perception
- So can the disjunctivist really solve the problem of hallucination?



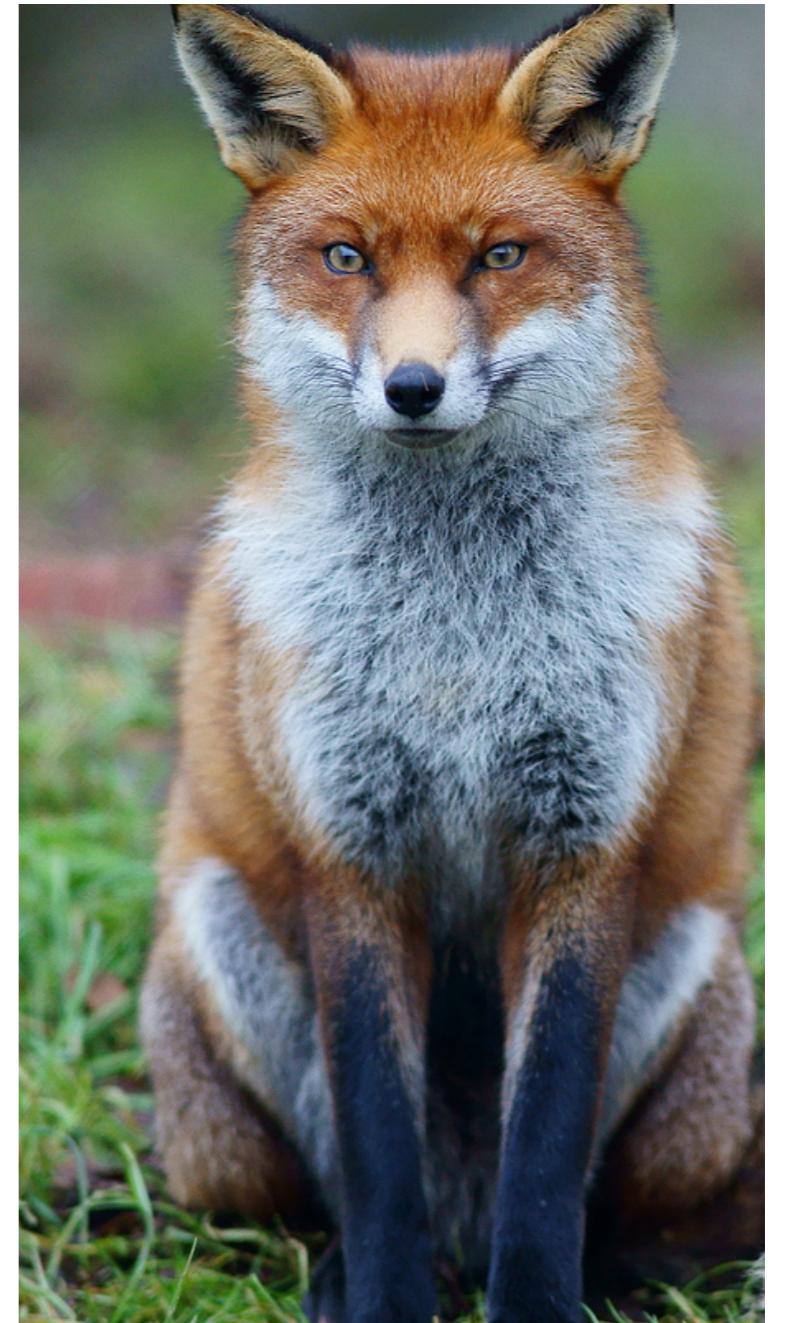
Negative characterisation of hallucination

- HALLUCINATIONS are subjectively indistinguishable from perceptions
- Why not just think that's all there is to a hallucination? Fundamentally, hallucinations are experiences that are subjectively indistinguishable from perceptions
- Note, perceptions also have this feature. Also perceptions are experiences that are subjectively indistinguishable from perceptions. But that doesn't yet give their fundamental kind.



Analogy: schmoxes

- A *schmox* is fundamentally an entity that has the visual appearance of a fox
- A fox is an entity that has the visual appearance of a fox
- It follows that a *schmox* and a fox have a common feature, they belong to the same (superficial) kind: being an entity that has the visual appearance of a fox
- But a fox is not fundamentally a *schmox*; fundamentally, we know, a fox is a *Vulpes vulpes*
- To explain what *schmoxes* are like we have to rely on a grasp of what foxes are like



Hallucinations as (explanatorily) dependent phenomena

- Hallucinations are like schmoxes: to explain what hallucinations are like we have to rely on a grasp of what perceptions are like, because the hallucination is nothing more than a kind of experience that is subjectively indistinguishable from a perception
- The concept of hallucination lacks explanatory autonomy from that of perception (Martin 2004, 73)
- An explanation of the phenomenology of perception now is required to explain the phenomenology of hallucination

M.G.F. Martin's 'Master Argument'

1. Perception is a presentation of mind-independent objects in our environment (Naive Realism)
2. Perception and hallucination are part of the natural causal order (Experiential Naturalism)

Therefore,

3. Perception and (causally matching) hallucination do not belong to the same fundamental kind of experience (Rejection of Common Kind Assumption)



And that's it

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Good luck!

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