

Perception

LECTURE TWO | MICHAELMAS 2017

Dr Maarten Steenhagen
ms2416@cam.ac.uk

Last Week

- **Phenomenological approach**
- Naive Realism
- Sense Datum Theory
- Argument from Illusion
- Time Lag Argument



Last Week

- Phenomenological approach
- **Naive Realism**
- Sense Datum Theory
- Argument from Illusion
- Time Lag Argument



Last Week

- Phenomenological approach
- Naive Realism
- **Sense Datum Theory**
- Argument from Illusion
- Time Lag Argument



Last Week

- Phenomenological approach
- Naive Realism
- Sense Datum Theory
- **Argument from Illusion**
- Time Lag Argument



Time-lags

- When we ordinarily take ourselves to see a star, our perceptual state is the result of how that star was a long time ago. The star might not even exist now; yet we would still be seeing exactly what we are seeing. So what we are in fact seeing cannot be identical with the star.
- We can add that there is nothing special about the star: all vision works like this, so we never in fact see the familiar objects in our environment.

Time-lag argument

1. When you seem to see a star at 2:40am, that star need not exist at 2:40am. (Assumption)
2. If you see O at t , then O must exist at t . (Assumption)
3. Therefore, when you seem to see the sun at 2:40am, you do not in fact see the sun. (From 1,2)
4. However, when you seem to see the sun there must be something you are seeing. (Assumption)
5. Therefore, when you seem to see a star at 2:40am, there is something you are seeing, and that thing exists at 2:40am, but it is not the sun. (From 3,4)

Time-lag argument

- “[The naive realist] can simply insist that the finite speed of light does not entail that we do not directly see things and states of affairs in the “external world,” but only that we must see them *as they were some time ago*. We see real physical things, properties, and events, all right, but *we see them late*, that is all. According to a direct realist, it is a mere prejudice of common sense—and one on which the time-lag argument trades—that the events, and the states of objects, that we see must be simultaneous with our (act of) seeing them.”

(Pitcher, *Theory of Perception* 1971:48, my italics)

Temporal and spatial perspectives

Compare:

- When we perceive a distant supernova, the supernova appears to us at a time that is different from the time the supernova actually occurred.
- When we perceive someone via a mirror, the person appears to us in a direction that is different from the location in which the person is located.



This Week

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



+

AFTER-IMAGES



AFTER-IMAGES



Perception, illusion, hallucination

- Veridical perception: you are consciously presented with an object that appears as it is
- Illusion: you are consciously presented with an object that appears in a way that conflicts with how it.
- Hallucination: you are undergoing a conscious experience, but you are not presented with an object at all



Argument from Hallucination

1. When you hallucinate you have introspective evidence for the existence of the object of awareness (Assumption)
 2. The object you hallucinate does not exist mind-independently (Assumption)
 3. Therefore, the object you hallucinate exists mind-dependently (From 1,2)
 4. The objects of hallucination are of the same kind as the objects of perception (Assumption)
 5. Therefore, the objects you perceive exist mind-dependently (From 3,4)
-
- Base Argument***
- Generalisation*

Which hallucinations?

1. When you hallucinate you have introspective evidence for the existence of the object of awareness (Contentious!)

Strategy for a defence of P1:

- I. Find a kind of experience where the Naive Realist agrees we have introspective evidence for the existence of the object of awareness
- II. Show that at least some hallucinations belong to the same kind of experience



Subjective Indistinguishability

- Suggestion: We know it is possible for a hallucination to be subjectively indistinguishable from a veridical perception. Let's mark such hallucinations in small-caps: HALLUCINATIONS
 - HALLUCINATION:
“When a subject has this kind of experience there is no suitable mind-independent material object in her environment to serve as a candidate object of perceptual awareness, even though she is having an experience that is subjectively indistinguishable from a genuine perception of the world.” (Soteriou 2016:16)
- So it seems that perception and HALLUCINATION are experiences of the same fundamental kind (Common Kind Assumption)

Exploiting the Common Kind Assumption

1. An ordinary perception affords introspective evidence for the existence of the object of awareness (Presentation)
2. HALLUCINATIONS are subjectively indistinguishable from some ordinary perception (Assumption)
3. If two experiences are subjectively indistinguishable, then they are experiences of the same fundamental kind (Assumption)
4. Perception and HALLUCINATION are experiences of the same fundamental kind (*Common Kind Assumption*; from 2,3)
5. If two states belong to the same fundamental kind of experience, then they afford their subject the same introspective evidence (Assumption)
6. When you HALLUCINATE you have introspective evidence for the existence of the object of awareness (*P1*; from 1,4, and 5)

Argument from Hallucination

1. When you HALLUCINATE you have introspective evidence for the existence of the object of awareness (Assumption)
 2. What you HALLUCINATE does not exist mind-independently (Assumption)
 3. Therefore, what you HALLUCINATE exists mind-dependently (From 1,2)
 4. The objects of HALLUCINATION are of the same kind as the objects of perception (Assumption)
 5. Therefore, what you perceive exists mind-dependently (From 3,4)
-
- Base Argument*
- Generalisation*

Why think the objects of hallucination and perception are of the same kind? (P4)

“Presumably the thought here is that if such experiences really are genuinely subjectively indistinguishable, then the sense-data that the subject is consciously aware of in each case must be perceptually indistinguishable, i.e. entities that one cannot distinguish on the basis of perception alone; and the fact that the relevant sense-data are perceptually indistinguishable is best explained by the proposal that they are entities of the same kind.”

Soteriou 2016:17

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)



Austin's soap

- “...even if we were to make the prior admission [...] that in the ‘abnormal’ cases [e.g. hallucinations] we perceive sense-data, we should not be obliged to extend this admission to the ‘normal’ cases too. For why on earth should it not be the case that, in some few instances, perceiving one sort of thing is exactly like perceiving another?” (Austin 1964:52)



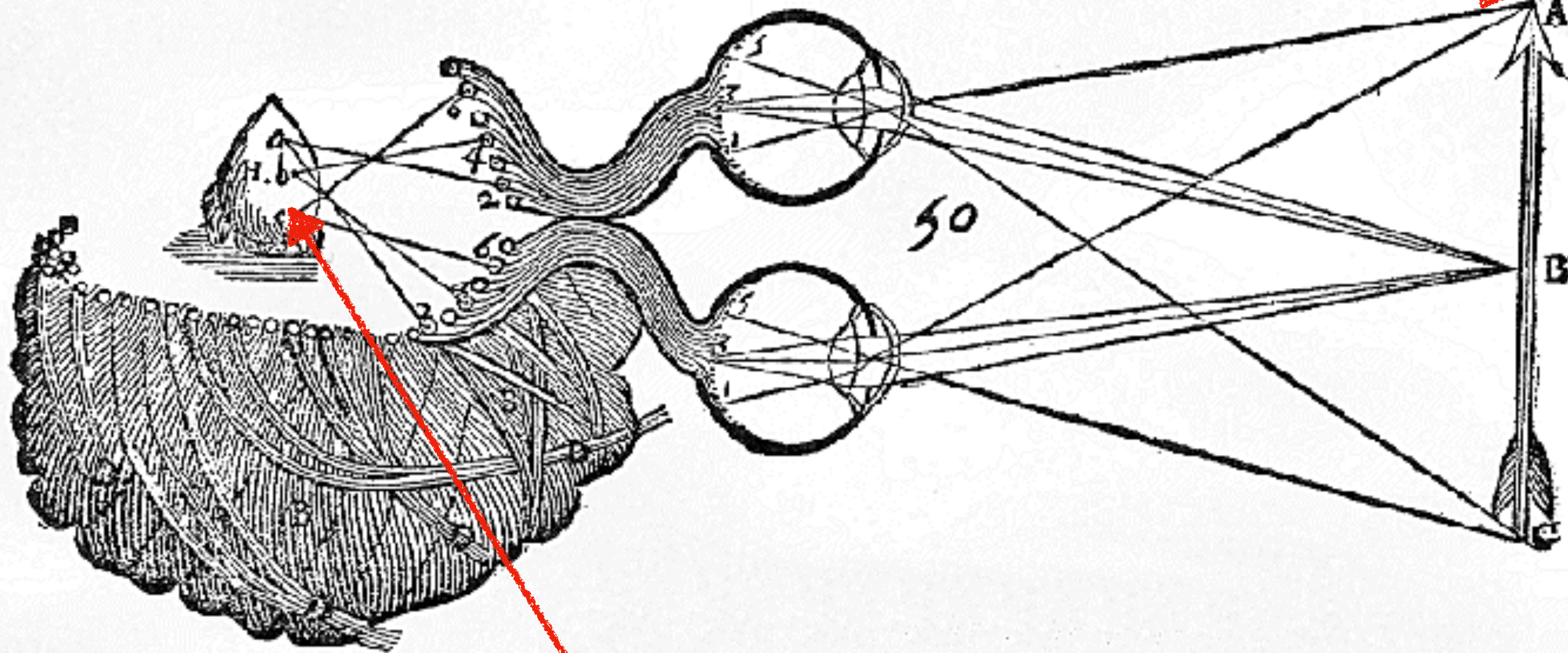
A dead end?

- If Austin is right, then even if what you HALLUCINATE exists mind-dependently, what you perceive could still just be the familiar, mind-independent objects in your environment.
- Can the defender of the Argument from Hallucination respond to Austin's way of undermining the generalisation?

The Causal Argument

- So far we have focused only on the phenomenology of the experience. But we know perception and hallucination are to some extent natural phenomena: they have causes in the same way a fever or headache have causes. (Experiential Naturalism)
- So we may define a class of hallucinations that is not only subjectively indistinguishable from a perception (i.e. HALLUCINATIONS), but also involves the same kind of proximate cause and brain state as that involved in kind of perception it cannot be distinguished from subjectively.
- Call these 'causally matching' HALLUCINATIONS.

Distal cause



Proximal cause

The Causal Argument

- Assumption: for any case of genuine perception it is possible, in principle at least, for there to be a corresponding causally matching HALLUCINATION
- This implies that in any case of perception the sufficient causal condition for both that perception and its corresponding causally matching HALLUCINATION are met
- So when we perceive, even if we are presented with mind independent objects, we are also presented with the kind of mind-dependent objects we would be presented with in a corresponding causally matching HALLUCINATION
- Therefore, in ordinary perception we are either (i) presented with both the mind-independent tomato and the mind-dependent sense-datum, or (ii) just presented with the mind-dependent sense-datum

Screening off problem

- Causally matching HALLUCINATIONS are subjectively indistinguishable from ordinary perceptions, and so have the same phenomenology
- In the case of the HALLUCINATIONS, that phenomenology (what it's like to undergo the experience) is fully explained by the presentation of a mind-dependent sense datum
- In the corresponding perception, we are presented with a mind-dependent sense-datum exactly like the one we are presented with when we HALLUCINATE
- The Naive Realist claim that the presentation of familiar, mind-independent objects explains the phenomenology of perception now seems now entirely redundant

Next week

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