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Epistemology: Theories of Perception



Importance of Perception

- Perception has a great epistemological importance.
 - Perception is one of the main sources of our knowledge.
 - The process by means of we acquire information about the world by using our five senses.
- Cognitive science examines perception by means of scientific methods, and examines different questions (How are we able to recognize objects?)
- Philosophers use different methods, and have different questions. They criticise the presupposed beliefs about perception.



Common Sense View about the World

1. The perceived objects exist independently of perceivers.

- Examples: We think that the Moon has been continuously existed even if it wasn't being perceived by anybody.

2. The objects have properties, and they possess of these properties even when they are not being perceived.

- The table has properties, it has mass, volume, shape, color, it is made of wood, etc. We usually think that the table has (some of) these properties independently from perceiver.



Common Sense View about the World

3. Perception is reliable. Perceptual knowledge is unproblematic: the world is like as we see it.

- If we see the building E of BME, we think that there is E building, and E building is like as we see it.
- In science: we make an experiment, we observe something, and we usually think that observations are reliable and unproblematic sources of our scientific knowledge.



The Reliability of Perception

Epistemological problems of perception:

How can we know that perception is reliable?

There are possible errors:

(i.) Illusions → An object appears to have some properties that in fact it does not have.

(ii.) Hallucinations → Hallucination occurs when someone takes herself to perceive an object, but in fact there is no object

(ii.b) The BIV/Matrix → is like a global hallucination

There are cases when our sensory experience appears to be real, but in fact it isn't.



Questions

1. Is perceptual knowledge possible?
2. How can we distinguish the veridical experience from non-veridical experience?
3. What are the immediate objects of perception?
4. What is the relation between our perception and the „real object“?
What does it mean our perception „represent“ the world?
5. What properties of objects are „real“, and what properties are depend on the perceiver and/or the circumstances of perception?



The Plan for Today

Different Metaphysical Possible Cases

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	Reality 'Out There'	Illusion	Hallucination BIV/Matrix
<i>I. Naïve realism</i>			
<i>II. Sense Data Theory</i>			
<i>III. Idealism</i>			
<i>IV. Disjunctivism</i>			



I. Realism

- We are *directly aware of the perceived* (external) *things*.
- *What is given* in the experience is *the perceived object itself*.
 - I.e. *When we look at a table, we can see the table, and we are directly aware of the table itself.*
- There is *no intermediary object* in process of perception.
- The *objects* we perceive are able to and commonly do *exist*, and retain some at least of their properties even when they are unperceived.
- The realist claims that: the objects *retain some* at least of their *properties* even if they are unperceived

Question:

What kind of properties retain their existence when the object is unperceived?



I. Realism

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Naïve realism	<p><i>Directly aware of the perceived (external) things</i></p> <p>Object itself</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">- <i>Is percieved</i>- <i>Exists</i>- <i>Retain some properties</i> <p>→ → → → → → →</p> <p>Perceptual knowledge is possible, since the objects are directly perceived.</p>		



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<p style="font-size: 2em;">Naïve realism</p>	<p><i>Directly aware of the perceived (external) things</i></p> <p>Object itself</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>Is perceived</i> - <i>Exists</i> - <i>Retain some properties</i> <p>→ → → → → → →</p> <p>Perceptual knowledge is possible, since the objects are directly perceived.</p>	<p>[1] If the objects themselves were directly perceived, it would be not possible to give an account of illusions.</p> <p>[2] It cannot be the case that people just misinterpret the object since they experience illusions and are often aware of the fact that what they actually perceive is an illusion</p>	



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I. Realism – Conclusion

- Naïve realism cannot explain cases (illusion) in which persons are deceived by their senses but they are aware of it. Thus, *something more than only the physical object bring about my perception.*
- It suggests that our perceptual experience cannot be brought about by some mind independent objects.



II. Sense Data Theory

We perceive mind- independent objects *mediately* , through sense-data (Locke)

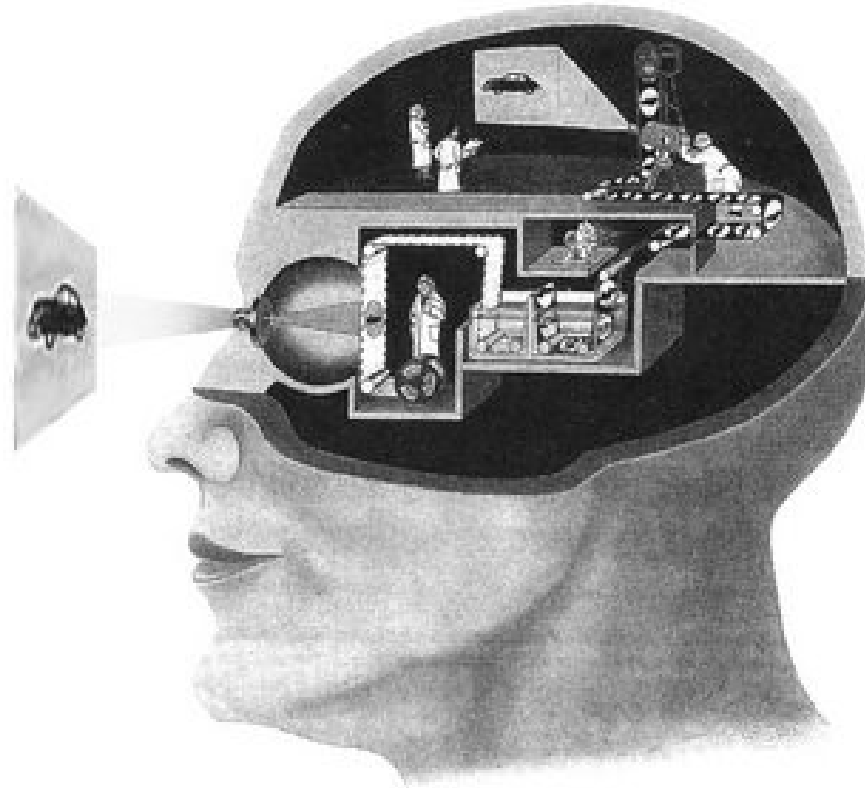
We perceive physical objects in virtue of mental objects.

We immediatly perceive mental objects, we don't perceive immediately the physical objects

- We do not (and cannot) perceive the external world as it really is.
- Instead we know only our ideas and interpretations of the way the world is.



II. Sense Data Theory – in Action



The subject experiences a ***mind-dependent concrete object with sensible qualities (sense-datum)***. Perception is based on sense-data, rather than on physical objects in the world.

The sense-datum must not necessarily resemble the physical object. We cannot know whether, for example, a red object we perceive is the same as the red “out there”.



II. Sense Data Theory

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Sense Data Theory	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• We immediatly perceive mental objects• We perceive mediately the physical objects <p>→ → → → → → →</p> <p>Perceptual knowledge is possible, because sense-datums represent the world</p>		



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II. Sense Data Theory – Conclusion

Conclusion

- SDT (Representative Realism a version of the SDT) holds that there are mind-independent objects, but they are perceived indirectly, through some mind-dependent objects. Representative realism allows for the indirect perception of the external world, thus it is possible to account for the relation between mind and world. Representative realism is.
- accepting SDT involves *metaphysically puzzling entities* (sense datums). We can ask what they are and what their *ontological status* is.



Causal Theory of Perception

Perceive an object is to be in a state that has some *appropriate causal relationship* to it.

There is an (immediate) **causal relation** between the real object and my experience.

Causal relation is relation between my perceptions and the physical world, this relation cannot be directly perceived (\approx SDT).



Causal Theory of Perception

“Suppose it looks to X as if there is a clock on the shelf; what more is required for it to be true to say that X sees a clock on the shelf? There must, one might say, actually be a clock on the shelf which is in X's field of view, before X's eyes. But this does not seem to be enough. For it is logically possible 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 when the shelf is 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 a treatment were applied to X on occasion when there were actually was a clock on the shelf, and if X's impressions were found to continue unchanged when the clock was removed or position altered then I think we should be inclined to say that X did not see the clock which was before his eyes, just because we should regard the clock as playing no part in the origination of his impression.”

Conclusion: if X sees a clock but can be deceived about seeing it then just in the case he sees it, the object itself must play a causal role. Thus, in the first case, X did not see the clock, because the clock itself did not play a part in in his perception



III. Idealism

- Says there are only the sensations we experience.
- The world is made of what we perceive and, thus, it is in principle accessible to our knowledge.
- Accepting idealism: if we take the world to be composed of what we perceive *only*, then the world is accessible to our senses and we can learn from perceptual experiences.
 - Similarities with Phenomenology?
What is the main difference between Phenomenology and Idealism?




III. Idealism

	Reality 'Out There'	Illusion Object appear to have properties that in fact it does't have	Hallucination/BIV someone takes herself to perceive an object, in fact there is no object / global hallucination
Idealism	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- there are only the sensations- world is composed of what we perceive only <p>→ → → → → → →</p> <p>Perceptual knowlegde is possible, but the phrase 'out there' is meaningless according to Idealism.</p>		



III. Idealism

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<h1>Idealism</h1>		<p>Barkely gives an account for illusions: occur when we mistakenly infer from one experience to another: We have a visual idea of a broken stick immersed in water, and we mistakenly think that our tactile idea will also be of a broken stick. <i>'It is how a stick looks like immersed in water'</i>.</p>	



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<p>Idealism</p>	<p>- there are only the sensations - world is composed of what we perceive only → → → → → → → Perceptual knowlegde is possible, but the phrase 'out there' is meaningless according to Idealism.</p>	<p>Barkely gives an account for illusions: occur when we mistakenly infer from one experience to another: We have a visual idea of a broken stick immersed in water, and we mistakenly think that our tactile idea will also be of a broken stick. <i>'It is how a stick looks like immersed in water'</i>.</p>	<p>If only the experience exists, then the problem of external world is meaningless</p>



III. Idealism – Conclusion

Conclusion

- According to this theory, knowledge can play the strongest role contrary to the other theories because we (can) know everything there is to know!
- In this theory, there is no room for the BIV case.
- However, the intuitive claim that there must be something else in the world.

Under idealism, the problem of skepticism (first seminar) does no longer arise because it identifies the external world with what the external world seems to us. There is no place for a good (reality out there) case or a bad case (BIV) here.



IV. Disjunctivism

- The object of perception is **mind-independent**.
- Disjunctivism is a developed version of *realism*.
- A disjunctivist claims just because we cannot distinguish the veridical perception and BIV cases (phenomenologically) does not mean they are the same type of mental states.



IV. Disjunctivism

In case of veridical perception – ‘reality out there’ and BIV, mental states are genuinely different.

- **Indistinguishability does not entail identity** (the first is not a transitive relation, the second is.)
- **The difference is not only a physical but mental.**



What makes a veridical perception (*classic Coke*) and a hallucination (*Zero Coke*) perceptible different, the former is made true by the experience (*by sugar*) of an object, and the latter is made perceptible by the Matrix (*by aspartam*) machine. But in fact, the two perception are inherently different metaphysically (*in kcal*,





IV. Disjunctivism

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Disjunctivism	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- perception is mind-independent \approx realism- Phenomenological indistinguishability does not entail identity- Difference is mental <p>→ → → → → → →</p> <p>Perceptual knowledge is possible. Veridical perception is made true by real objects.</p>		



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IV. Disjunctivism – Conclusion

Conclusion:

Even if experiences are indistinguishable, it does not mean that they are the same type. Similarly to the Naïve Realism, Disjunctivism fails to deal with illusions, however it gives an account for hallucination indeed.



V. Final Conclusion

	Reality 'Out There'	Illusion	Hallucination BIV/Matrix
Naïve realism	<i>Directly aware of the perceived (external) things</i> Object itself - Is perceived Exists Retain some properties: Perceptual knowledge is possible, since the objects are directly perceived.	[1] If the objects themselves were directly perceived, it would be not possible to give an account of illusions. [2] It cannot be the case that people just misinterpret the object since they experience illusions and are often aware of the fact that what they actually perceive is an illusion	<u>Hallucination</u> : In case of hallucination, there is nothing out there, then naïve realism does not work, since it says the object itself is experienced. <u>BIV</u> : One can say that a projection by the Matrix/Demon is mind-independent. In this case, perceptual knowledge is possible since the object of perception is the projected vision.
Sense Data Theory	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> We immediately perceive mental objects & We perceive mediately the physical objects Perceptual knowledge is possible, because sense-datums represent the world	In case of illusion sense datums are <i>modified and/or affected</i> by some factors. Eg, if someone sees a mirage in the desert, then the experienced desert represented by sense datums is tied to the real desert but the experienced mirage (bunch of lake-like sense datums) fails to represent the desert properly.	<u>In case of hallucination</u> : <i>extra sense – “fake” – datums are added</i> , which do not refer to anything real. Seeing spiders on the wall, SD represent the spiders do not refer to anything real. <u>In case of BIV</u> : SDT holds the same, except that there are no sense datums which refer to real objects, since there are no real object at all. In this case, every experienced sense datums are “fake”.
Idealism	- there are only the sensations & world is composed of what we perceive only & Perceptual knowledge is possible, but the phrase ‘out there’ is meaningless according to Idealism.	Barkely gives an account for illusions: occur when we mistakenly infer from one experience to another : We have a visual idea of a broken stick immersed in water, and we mistakenly think that our tactile idea will also be of a broken stick. <i>‘It is how a stick looks like immersed in water’.</i>	If only the experience exists, then the problem of external world is meaningless
Disjunctivism	- perception is mind-independent ≈ realism & Phenomenological indistinguishability does not & entail identity & Difference is mental & Perceptual knowledge is possible. Veridical perception is made true by real objects.	Illusion is a problematic* point of disjunctivism, since in case of illusion the object of the experience is „there” but misinterpreted or affected. It is hard to explain how it is possible and what kind of mental state is there in question.*Remember: Realism had problem with Illusion as well.	Even if the experience itself looks like the same as the veridical perception, it is not the same, in fact it is a genuinely different mental state, since it was brought about by a different source.