Naïve realism without disjunctivism about experience

Introduction

Naïve realism regards the sensory experiences that subjects enjoy when perceiving (hereafter *perceptual* experiences) as being, in some sense, presentational of the objects of perception.[12] In enjoying a perceptual experience a subject stands in a relation to the thing that they perceive, such that the subjective aspect of their experience, the peculiar way in which the subject is appeared to on such an occasion, is constituted by that which they perceive. It is frequently argued that this naïve realist view of the nature of perceptual experience requires one to adopt disjunctivism about experience. In order to accommodate the possibility of hallucinatory experiences that are subjectively indiscriminable from perceptual experiences (hereafter *perfect non-perceptual* experiences) the naïve realist must maintain that such experiences are of a fundamentally different nature to those that occur when perceiving.[3] Or so the argument goes.

It is my intention to show that the possibility of such non-perceptual experience need not compel a naïve realist to adopt a disjunctive conception of experience.[4] Instead, they can maintain that the intrinsic nature of perceptual and hallucinatory experience is the same, while still claiming that perceptual experience is presentational of the objects of perception. On such a view the difference between perceptual and non-perceptual experience will lie in the nature of the objects that are so presented. This is to adopt disjunctivism about the objects of experience, about that which is apparently present in experience.

There are two problems for this line of thought. First, this results in a picture of the objects of experience in cases of perfect non-perceptual experience as being both

[1] There are many different formulations of naïve realism, but most are committed to the sort of claims expressed here. See, for example, Martin (2004, 2006), Brewer (2007, 2008) and Smith (2002).

[2] Everyone should agree that perceptual experience at least *appears* presentational, in the sense that it really does seem as if there is something literally present to mind in an immediate way when we perceive. Not everyone, of course, agrees that perceptual experience actually *is* presentational.

[3] For uses of disjunctivism to defend naïve realism in the face of the possibility of hallucination see, for example, Martin (2004, 2006) and Fish (2009).

[4] Experiential disjunctivism may well prove unworkable, at least if Martin is correct about the form it must take. For Martin's version of disjunctivism and his arguments for it see Martin (2004, 2006). For substantial criticisms of this approach, see Siegel (2004), and Smith (2009).

actual and mind-independent. And it may be objected that this is just too implausible to accept, given what we know about how such experiences can be brought about.

Second, if we think that the physical basis of some non-perceptual experience is sufficient for the occurrence of the awareness of some entity, then a perceptual experience whose causal basis includes the whole of the causal basis of the non-perceptual experience (a causally matching perceptual experience) must involve awareness of the same kind of entity. But how can this be consistent with supposing that in the perceptual experience one is presented with things in the world? The naïve realist who accepts a common view of the nature of perceptual and non-perceptual experience faces the problem of explaining how what is in common does not 'get in the way,' or 'screen off' the objects that we perceive from being what one is most immediately aware of.

I intend to outline what sort of strategy the naïve realist needs to adopt, and consider one particular way of implementing it. Before that I will look at what reasons there are for thinking that the naïve realist must reject a common view of the nature of perceptual and non-perceptual experience.

Naïve realism and the common kind assumption

The naïve realist conception of the nature of perceptual experience does not automatically rule out a conception of hallucinatory experience according to which it shares the same nature. There is no inconsistency in supposing that both perceptual and non-perceptual experiences have the same kind of fundamental nature. By 'fundamental nature' I mean that which makes the experience the experience that it is – its essence. According to the naïve realist, what makes a perceptual experience the experience that it is, is the subject of the experience standing in a special relation to some object. What makes it a *perceptual* experience is the fact that this object is something in the world. If the naïve realist also thought that what makes a hallucinatory experience the experience that it is, is the subject of the experience standing in the same relation to something, then they are conceiving of hallucinatory experience as having the same fundamental nature as perceptual experience. What would make the experience *hallucinatory* would be something about the kind of entity to which the subject was related in experience.

The fact that there is no immediate conflict between naïve realism and giving a common account of perceptual and non-perceptual experience is not widely recognised. This is probably because it seems incredible to most people that a story could be given of the nature of hallucination that could generalise to perception in a way that does not threaten naïve realism. Nevertheless, the possibility is clearly there.

To conceive of the difference in the nature of perceptual and hallucinatory experience to lie in a difference in the nature of the object that is presented in such experiences is to adopt what we can refer to as disjunctivism about the objects of experience.[5]

Mike Martin has argued that the naïve realist cannot avail themselves of this sort of disjunctivism. His reason is that the following two claims:

1. Whatever kind of thing perceptual experience is, hallucinatory experience is also that kind of thing. (The Common Kind Assumption)
2. Experiences are 'part of the natural causal order, subject to broadly physical and psychological causes' (Experiential Naturalism). (Martin 2006: 357)

are inconsistent with:

3. Perceptual experience is a relation between a subject and a mind-independent object (naïve realism)

This is because experiential naturalism commits us to rejecting hallucinatory experience as a relation to a mind-independent object. By the common kind assumption, whatever kind of thing perceptual experience is, hallucinatory experience is also that kind of thing. If perceptual experience were a relation to a mind-independent object, then so too would hallucinatory experience. But hallucinatory experience is not a relation to a mind-independent object. So naïve realism must be false. As experiential naturalism is not easily contestable, the naïve realist must reject (1), the common kind assumption, and so adopt disjunctivism about experience.

Let's look at the argument for why Martin doesn't take it to be plausible that non-perceptual experience could be a relation to a mind-independent object.

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[5] Byrne and Logue refer to it as 'Austinian disjunctivism' and Thau (2004) talks about 'disjunctivism about the objects of experience'. There are affinities with what Price (1950) called 'The Selective Theory.' Martin expresses the position in his (1997: 95-96), and links it with Austin.

First, such a position maintains that non-perceptual experience is relational. If this is the case then it is a necessary condition for the obtaining of non-perceptual experience that there is some object to which the subject is related.

Second, the commitment to experiential naturalism in turn commits us to something like the following claim:

> Appropriate stimulation of the various sensory areas of the cortex should be sufficient to bring about a visual, auditory or tactual experience, or at least to fix the chance of its occurring. (Martin. Forthcoming)

These two conditions generate the following constraint: If neural stimulation is sufficient for the occurrence of a non-perceptual experience as of an object with a certain character, and the existence of an object that appears to have that character is necessary for the experience, then it must be the case that whenever the neural stimulation obtains, the object obtains.

Martin then claims that if we suppose the object to have an existence independent of the experience of it then the mind-independent objects of non-perceptual experience have some sort of objectionable role to play in determining whether the physical conditions sufficient for the occurrence of such experience obtain.

He raises three ways we might conceive of satisfying the constraint, while maintaining that the experience has a mind-independent object. The first is that there is a multitude of non-perceptual objects such that whenever a subject is caused to have a suitable pattern of neuronal excitation there is always a non-perceptual object of the right sort for him to be related to. This should be ruled out on the grounds of its extravagance in postulating a non-perceptual object of every kind that there could be, in every location that there could be. The second option considered is that 'non-perceptual' objects prevent the neural stimulation that would result in an experience in all situations in which there is no non-perceptual object appropriately placed. The third option is that the obtaining of the neural excitation, as well as being sufficient for the obtaining of a non-perceptual experience, causes the obtaining of the non-perceptual object of that experience. As Martin puts it:

> The physical causes of acts of sensing are also causally active in bringing appropriate sensibilia into a position to be sensed […] the causes of sensing are

> causally sufficient for them because they are also causally sufficient for the acts of sensings independent objects. (Martin. Forthcoming)

The second and third options are questionable on the grounds that they posit casual relations between perceptual and non-perceptual objects that we have no supporting evidence for other than the need to preserve a conception of non-perceptual experience as a relation to such objects. I suppose the thought here is that, if there are non-normal objects of non-perceptual experience then the postulation that they are dependent upon non-perceptual experience is all that is reasonably supported by what we know about the world. To claim that they are experience independent is to go further then we need to, given that we know that neural stimulation is sufficient for non-perceptual experience

And, given this, the simplest, most parsimonious account to give is one in which the object depends for its existence upon the experience. Other accounts, while not being impossible, are more extravagant in postulating causal relations between normal and non-normal objects, and so, all things being equal, should be ruled out. If we are trying to explain the apparent relationality of non-perceptual experience, given what we know about how such experiences can come about, we should consider such experience as either a relation to a mind-dependent object, or not relational at all.

Once we accept this, then if we are to be naïve realist about the nature of perceptual experience, we must reject the common kind assumption and embrace disjunctivism. For it seems that the naïve realist cannot give an account of hallucination in terms of it consisting in the same relation between subject and object that they maintain occurs when perceiving, as this is highly implausible. There are two options left to the naïve realist at this point. The first is to maintain that hallucination is a relational state of affairs, but of a very different kind to that involved in their conception of perceptual experience. In hallucinatory experience the object is constituted, in some sense, by the relation in which the subject stands to it. In the perceptual case the object is independent of this relation. The alternative option is to reject the idea that hallucination is relational. Either way, the naïve realist has denied the common fundamental nature of perceptual and hallucinatory experience.

Hallucination as presentational

Perfect non-perceptual experience will seem presentational upon reflection upon it. This follows from it being subjectively indiscriminable from perceptual experience. In perceptual experience it seems to us as if we are presented with some item in an ontologically immediate way. When one hallucinates and one is unable to discriminate one's experience from perceptual experience, then such experience will also appear presentational, or else it *will* be discriminable from perceptual experience.

To think of such experience as being presentational in nature is, then, to be less revisionary about how such experience appears to us to be than an account that does not regard it as presentational. We might say that we have a 'naïve conception of hallucination,' and that a presentational construal of the nature of such experience is in accord with this conception.[6]

Why the object of experience must be awareness-independent

John Foster offers a rejection of the intelligibility of a state of affairs in which a genuine entity is present to a subject whose existence is not independent of this state of affairs. We cannot make sense of this being a genuinely relational state of affairs between subject and object, for the object threatens to 'vanish' into the experiential episode (Foster 2000: 164-170). But for a visual experience to be genuinely relational the object of experience (what he refers to as a sense-datum) must have 'a form of existence which transcends its standing in that presentational relationship' (Foster 2000: 170).

He considers three ways in which we might make sense of the notion that the episode of awareness 'constitutes' its object.

(i) The object may be constituted by the fact of its presentation to a particular subject on a particular occasion

(ii) The object may consist in the fact of its presentation to a particular subject on a particular occasion

(iii) The object and its presentation to a particular subject on a particular occasion are constituted by that subject's being in a further psychological state on that occasion. This state would not involve the occurrence of its object. (Foster 2000: 169)

[6]See Hawthorne and Kovakovitch (2006: 178).

Foster takes the first possibility to be 'manifestly incoherent' and the second to be incoherent at least upon first reflection. If we think that the object of experience is constituted by the presentation of that object to a subject at a particular time, we are already assuming its existence in explaining how it comes to be.

The second approach is that which, presumably, reflects how most philosophers would conceive of the awareness-dependence of objects of experience. And the intuitive problem with this is as to how, in the object of experience deriving its being from an act of awareness, it can be available as the object of that awareness, as that which the awareness is directed upon.

The last alternative which Foster considers for the sense-datum theorist to take is the view that the object of experience and the presentational episode are both constituted by some other, more fundamental fact. Foster takes this further fundamental fact to be a psychological one, and accordingly rejects it on the grounds that, firstly, we have no idea what this psychological fact would be and secondly, that this would mean that the sense-datum account of experience is not getting to grips with what the fundamental nature of experience really is. The basic nature of experience would be given by an account of what this mysterious further psychological episode is.

But why should Foster think that this further fact is a psychological one? If one maintained that the object of experience and the presentational episode were both constituted by the same non-psychological episode, then one could explain the transcendent nature of the objects presented to us in experience and still have an account which offers an explanation of the fundamental nature of visual experience. One would have an account of what visual experience is, at its most fundamental psychological level. It is this kind of approach that I suggest the naïve realist should appeal to in understanding the nature of hallucinatory experience along the same lines as perceptual experience.

Accommodating experiential naturalism

It might be thought that *even if* there is introspective evidence for causally matching hallucination being presentational, and hence relational in nature, and *even if* a relational conception of causally matching hallucination requires us to think of the objects of such experiences as being mind-independent, if such a position violates our

commitment to experiences being part of the natural causal order, then we must reject one of the two claims that has led us to this violation. Either such experience is not relational, and appearances are misleading, or there is some way of making good the thought that experience can be genuinely relational even thought the objects of that experience depend for their existence upon it.

It is not clear to me, however, that a denial of experiential naturalism is necessitated by an attempt to conjoin the common kind assumption with naïve realism. It seems clear that neither of the first two strategies that Martin considers are satisfactory. The first because of its postulation of every kind of non-normal object wherever someone might enjoy such an experience, and the second because of the causal interaction of these non-normal objects with the physical world, in the sense that they must play a role in preventing the obtaining of the physical conditions that will generate a hallucination in any situation in which there is no suitable non-normal object to be sensed. The third strategy that Martin considers, however, is by no means as unpalatable as the others. According to this picture, the physical basis of a causally matching perfect non-perceptual experience brings into existence the object of that experience, which is then sensed by the subject.

We should recognise that there is, at least on the face of it, nothing obviously implausible about the thought that objects can be generated out of, or depend for their existence upon, physical processes and events that are not parts of those objects. So one might take seriously, for example, the thought that virtual objects are genuine objects that depend for their existence upon the physical processes and states of the computer that we quite naturally think of generating them. Of course it is open to someone to argue that these are not genuine objects, perhaps along the lines that they do not exist independently of our awareness of them. But to advocate that virtual objects are genuine objects would not be to violate a naturalistic understanding of the world. Such objects would have a place within the natural causal order. They would depend for their existence and characteristics upon the operations of the computer that generates them. We could appeal to the notion of supervenience in order to reconcile the existence of such objects with naturalism. Virtual objects would then be conceived of as entities that supervene upon the physical realm. It seems, then, at least plausible that we have a perfectly good example of objects being generated, or brought about, or depending upon, physical goings on in the world, in such a way that does not necessarily violate a naturalistic world view.

The Common Element

In maintaining that the nature of perceptual and causally matching non-perceptual experience is the same, the naïve realist need not be violating any commitment that we might have to experiential naturalism. Furthermore, there is phenomenological support for the thought that philosophers' hallucination is presentational, and hence relational, in nature. If there is good reason to suppose that for experience to be genuinely presentational, the objects of experience must be independent of their presence in experience, then to satisfy this phenomenological intuition that hallucination is presentational, we should think that the objects of such experiences are awareness-independent.

So far, so good for the naïve realist. There is one major obstacle remaining to their being able to provide a satisfactory account of hallucination. In rejecting disjunctivism the naïve realist no longer faces the problem of how to conceive of perceptual experience as being of the same kind as causally matching perfect non-perceptual experience but not of the same fundamental kind. But this worry is just replaced by a very similar worry as to how the naïve realist can understand the objects of causally matching perfect non-perceptual experience as being present when one enjoys a perceptual experience. David Smith expresses this worry as follows:

> If such stimulation [a replication of the stimulation that would occur in some perceptual experience] is regarded as causing a real entity or process to exist, it can hardly be supposed that giving this same type of stimulus one rather than another type of causal antecedent can annihilate or prevent occurrence of this sensory entity, and the consequence awareness of it. (Smith 2002: 235)

But if the perceptual and non-perceptual experiences involve awareness of the same kind of entity, how can the naïve realist maintain that the perceptual experience is also an awareness of an entity that is a normal object in the world? To put it another way, the naïve realist supposes that the object of experience in a perceptual experience is the object of perception, a normal object in the world. But how is this possible, if the object of experience in such a case is also the same kind of thing as the object of

experience in a causally matching non-perceptual experience, which is *not* a normal object?[7]

In what follows I will outline the general sort of strategy that the naïve realist must adopt in order to satisfy this concern. I cannot yet offer any conclusive reasons for supposing that this strategy will be a successful one, but I will offer one picture of how it might be adopted in practice.

The strategy

The naïve realist can hope to solve the problem facing them by taking a particular stance as to the nature of the object of experience in the hallucinatory case. The answer for the naïve realist will lie in how they conceive of the nature of the entity that is the object of experience in cases of causally matching perfect non-perceptual experiences. To illustrate this strategy I will look at one particular way in which the naïve realist can do this that offers them a way of generalising from the non-perceptual to the perceptual case. It will consist in them conceiving of the object of experience in the hallucinatory case as an uninstantiated universal.

One important point to mention is that that we should not be confused by the fact that we refer to that which is present in experience as the 'object of experience' and we more generally use the term 'object' to denote a kind of entity. But by 'object of experience' we do not actually *mean* 'object' in this other sense. Reflection upon experience leaves it open as to what metaphysical category the entity that is the object of experience belongs to.

Mark Johnston (2004) offers an account of the relation between perceptual and hallucinatory experience that, with some minor modifications, can be adopted by the naïve realist. The essence of the account is illustrated in the following passage:

> Just as the constitutional basis for a hallucination can be a proper part of the constitutional basis of another, subjectively indiscernible act of seeing so also the objects of a hallucination can be proper parts of the objects seen in another, subjectively indiscernible act of seeing. (Johnston 2004: 139-140)

Johnston fleshes this out in the following way. In enjoying a sensory experience a subject is aware of a sensible profile, 'a complex, partly qualitative and partly

[7] See Johnston (2004) and Valberg (1992) for presentations of the problem.

relational property, which exhausts the way the particular scene before your eyes is if your perceptual experience is veridical' (Johnston 2004: 134). When one is perceiving the world, one is aware of the particulars that instantiate aspects of this profile. When one is hallucinating, one is aware only of the sensible profile.

> The objects of hallucination and the objects of seeing are in a certain way akin; the first are complexes of sensible qualities and relations while the second are spatio-temporal particulars instantiating such complexes […] When the visual system misfires, as in hallucination, it presents uninstantiated complexes of sensible qualities and relations, at least complexes not instantiated there in the scene before the eyes. (Johnston 2004: 135)[8]

So the naïve realist can say that one possibility for the naïve realist is to conceive of the entities that are the objects of experience in the hallucinatory case as uninstantiated sensible profiles. These entities are present when one perceives something, but in such a case are instantiated by the thing perceived. The object of experience is an instantiated sensible profile, and also, the thing that instantiates this profile. In hallucination you are sensing a certain sort of entity, and in perception you are sensing the same sort of entity, but this time it is instantiated by a normal object. The entity does not get in the way of the object in the perceptual case. In the hallucinatory case, one is not presented with an object, understood as a bearer of properties. Rather, one is presented with a complex of properties. In the perceptual case, one is presented with a complex of properties *and* an object which bears, or possesses these properties. But the properties that are in common between the perceptual and the non-perceptual case do not get in the way of the awareness of the object; they do not render the awareness of the object indirect.

I want to finish by highlighting some potential problems of such an account. In particular, does it really make sense to suppose that the entities that we are aware of in hallucinatory experience are not concrete, in the sense that they do not exist in space, as we seem to be committed to if we think of them as uninstantiated universals. Alternatively, if we do not wish to think of the object of experience as being an uninstantiated universal, perhaps we could think of it as being a particularised

[8] Or, more precisely, in hallucination one is aware of a sensible profile, but not aware of an instantiation of a sensible profile. This modification is intended to accommodate the possibility of veridical hallucination. See Johnston (2004: 178-179n16).

property, or trope. In this way the object of experience in the perceptual and non-perceptual experience can be of the same kind, but the object in the perceptual case, as well as being a particularised property, is also a normal object, for the trope could be thought of as being possessed by this object. But then we would just be faced with the new problem of explaining how this particularised property can occur unattached to any object, in hallucinatory experience.

A more general worry is that this strategy would require the naïve realist to make some substantial metaphysical claims. And the problem with this might be that an adequate conception of the nature of perceptual experience should be one that does not require any specific story about what kinds of entity that there are (universals, tropes, and so on). The appeal to such a metaphysics to make the naïve realist position work might strike us as ad hoc. On the other hand, the naïve realist could respond to this charge by pointing out that a metaphysical response here is appropriate because what it is that they are presented with is a metaphysical challenge. How can the nature of the object of experience in causally matching perfect non-perceptual experience be such that its presence in perceptual experience does not prevent the object of perception in such cases from being the object of experience?