Why Martin’s Disjunctivism is the Preferable Account of Naïve Realism

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The Argument from Hallucination has persuaded many away from their pre-philosophical notions about veridical perception. Those who are seduced by the Argument from Hallucination do not believe that one ever has direct access to mind-independent reality. Naïve realists resist this conclusion, defending common sense and arguing that mind-independent reality actually constitutes one’s thoughts in veridical perception. Mark Johnston and M.G.F. Martin are two such naïve realists. Johnston defends naïve realism by stating that cases of indiscriminability between hallucination and veridical perception can be explained by a shared feature. This shared feature is mind-dependent in the case of hallucination, but is instantiated by a mind-independent object in the case of veridical perception. Martin takes a different approach, arguing that there is no robust feature of hallucination. Hallucination’s only feature is its indiscriminability from veridical perception. Both Johnston’s and Martin’s views have their good and bad points, but I will argue that Martin’s view is the more philosophically tenable in light of the Argument from Hallucination and therefore that it should be the preferred defense of naïve realism.

Before one was tainted by philosophy, one believed that one had direct access to mind-independent objects. When one veridically perceived an orange water bottle, one might have said that the fact that one was seeing a mind-independent object is made manifest by the mere perception of it (though perhaps in less philosophical terms). The Argument from Hallucination questions this view. The Argument gains its potency by emphasizing the “bad cases,” the instances when a perceiver cannot tell the difference between mind-independent reality and a mind-dependent hallucination. Let us say that Sally, walking through the desert and water-deprived, notices what looks to be a well in front of her. The well appears to her as a mind-independent well would, seeming appropriately vivid and displaying well-like sensory characteristics. Sally thinks that she is seeing a mind-independent well but in reality is merely experiencing a mirage. The Argument from Hallucination asks why, if perceivers are mistaken about accessing mind-independent reality in some cases, one should ever assume one has mind-independent objects as unmediated constituents of one’s thoughts.

From the Argument from Hallucination springs “perceptual bottleneck theorists.” These theorists, seduced by the Argument from Hallucination, believe that one never has access to mind-independent reality. For instance, sense-datum theorists believe that one only ever perceives mind-dependent sensory data, data that may or may not reflect external reality. So when Sally saw the mirage in the desert and when Sally sees a real well that is indiscriminable from her mirage, she is seeing the same thing. The sense data in the case of the mirage and in the case of the real well are the same. Sense datum theorists address the problem of hallucinations that are indiscriminable from veridical perceptions by arguing that in both cases one perceives the same thing: sense data.¹

¹ Henceforth in my paper I will refer to hallucinations that are indiscriminable from veridical perceptions as just “hallucinations” though of course not all hallucinations are indiscriminable from veridical perception.
But a perceptual bottleneck theorist need not go so far as the sense datum theory, arguing that all one ever perceives is mind-dependent sensory data. The intentionalist holds that one experiences mind-independent objects, but only through the filter of visual experience. John Searle, an intentionalist, argues that one’s experience of a mind-independent well and a mind-dependent hallucination well are the same if the conditions of satisfaction for one’s beliefs about both experiences are the same. So if Sally believes she is seeing a mind-independent well when she is seeing a mirage, then the conditions of satisfaction will be that the well exists in mind-independent reality. Sally’s conditions of satisfaction actually affect the way she sees the well, so if she believes that the well is mind-independent, that will determine the way she sees it. So Sally sees the well as mind-independent even though the conditions of satisfaction are not satisfied: the mirage well does not actually exist in mind-independent reality. When visual experiences have conditions of satisfaction which are not satisfied, “it is the visual experience and not the world which is at fault.” So when Sally mistakenly believes the mirage to be a mind-independent well this does not mean that she never sees mind-independent reality; sometimes she sees an object as mind-independent and the conditions of satisfaction are satisfied. Rather, Sally’s experience of mind-independent reality is filtered through her visual experience of it. The case of hallucination that is indistinguishable from veridical perception is explained by the two perceptions having the same visual experience because they possess the same conditions of satisfaction. This is not the same as the sense-datum view. Sense-datum theorists maintain that one is seeing the same thing in the case of indistinguishable hallucination and veridical perception. Intentionalists hold that one is seeing two different phenomena when one perceives a hallucination and when one perceives something veridically. In other words, both the intentionalist and the sense datum theorist believe that one never has direct access to mind independent reality. However, intentionalists believe that the visual experience is the same in the case of hallucination and veridical perception whereas the sense datum theorists think that the object of awareness is the same in both cases.

In light of these powerful phenomenal bottleneck explanations of indistinguishable hallucinatory and veridical perceptions it may seem as if naïve realism is done for. But one must remember that all of these theorists are trying to characterize veridical perception. The naïve realist may argue that the phenomenal bottleneck theorists are getting hung up on explaining an objection to common-sense views of perception without staying true to what veridical perception feels like to the layperson. Sally, a laywoman, does not think of herself as enjoying a sense-datum of a water bottle or as enjoying a certain experience of a mind-independent water bottle which may or may not prove to reflect what she perceives. She thinks, as she gazes at her orange water bottle with her college insignia, that the water bottle is somehow constitutive of her awareness and that there is no filter of experience or sense-datum getting in the way of her perception of it. One may argue that a layperson’s views on perception should not be considered in philosophical discussions on the subject, but for the purposes of this essay let us assume that common-sense views serve as appropriate motivation for a defense of naïve realism.

Martin, a naïve realist, gives a disjunctive account of perception. For him, when it looks to Sally as if there is a well before her, then either there is a well before her that looks to Sally to be so or it is to Sally

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Why Martin’s Disjunctivism is the Preferable Account of Naïve Realism

merely as if this was so.\(^3\) There are two important consequences of this view. The first is that in the case of veridical perception a mind-independent object is actually constitutive of one’s thoughts. The second is that, according to Martin, there is no robust account of hallucination.

This lack of a robust account is both the strength of Martin’s theory and its weakness. By not giving a robust account of hallucination, Martin’s theory effectively blocks a key proposition in the arguments of perceptual bottleneck theorists that they may use in critiquing his theory. Both sense datum theorists and intentionalists come to the conclusion that one never has direct access to mind-independent reality because they assert a common kind in cases of veridical perception and cases of hallucination. In sense datum theories, the theory that in both veridical perception and hallucinatory perception one only immediately perceives mind-dependent sense-data allows the theory to argue against naïve realism. If one only ever perceives mind-dependent reality, one can never have a mind-independent object directly constitute one’s thoughts. The intentionalist also uses the common kind assumption in her refutation of naïve realism. The intentionalist believes that in both cases of veridical perception and of hallucination, one always perceives the objects of one’s awareness through the filter of visual experience. If there is always a filter then one may never be directly aware of mind-independent objects. Because the common kind assumption is such an important proposition for a perceptual bottleneck theorist, Martin’s theory blocks a perceptual bottleneck theorist from coming in and arguing that the common kind that hallucination and veridical perception share “does the work” in the good case, turning his view into a perceptual bottleneck theory. I will give an illustration of how this argument may work in my discussion of Johnston’s take on naïve realism.

The weakness in Martin’s assertion that there is no robust account of hallucination is that this seems counter-intuitive. Naïve realists started their project in order to stay true to common sense and yet the denial of a robust account seems less than commonsensical. Sally experienced a well mirage, a hallucination so convincing that she believed she was experiencing an instance of veridical perception. Surely there must be something robust there, whether it is an image or other certain sensible qualities that convinced her that she was experiencing a veridical perception. Martin’s denial of a robust common kind between hallucination and veridical perception seems unsatisfying to the layperson who wants to know what quality of Sally’s hallucination led her to mistake it for a veridical perception.

Martin has an answer for this, however. He suggests that a robust account of hallucination is actually counterintuitive because it would assume that one has more knowledge of one’s own mind and experience than one may be prepared to admit. For

such views [which provide a robust account of hallucination] will attribute to subjects who grasp the concept of perfect hallucination both the power to identify the marks of experience in having an experience and a recognition of their modal independence of the conditions of perceiving.\(^4\)


A robust account of hallucination, Martin states, would characterize “a perceptual experience [as] a kind of event which has certain distinctive features $E_1 \ldots E_n$.\footnote{Ibid.} For a robust account, would “not only… [be] necessary and sufficient for an event to be an experience, but, in addition, an event’s possession of them is introspectible by the subject of the experience.”\footnote{Ibid.} So if one provides a robust account of hallucination this would mean that when one recognizes a hallucination which is indistinguishable from a veridical perception as such, one is really recognizing that the hallucination contained $E_1 \ldots E_n$. Also, if there was a mental state that did not involve characteristics $E_1 \ldots E_n$ than the perceiver should be able to recognize the absence of these features as well as she could recognize the presence of them in the case of the hallucination. This awareness of set characteristics in both the good case and the bad case seem improbably demanding on one’s self-awareness. Among other things, the robust view seems to “attribute to responsible subjects potential infallibility about the course of their experiences.”\footnote{Ibid., 283.} This “potential infallibility” seems implausible since the doctrine of infallibilism about the mental is particularly problematic in relation to sensory states once we are forced to admit that appearances systematically appear to us other than they are. For if we can be misled with respect to some properties of sensory experiences, there is a question as to what can motivate the claim that we are infallible in other judgments about them.\footnote{Ibid.}

While Sally perceives the mirage well, it looks to her to be indiscriminable from a veridical perception without her consciously enumerating the features that her awareness does or does not have. Similarly, if she never mistook the mirage for a veridical perception and always realized it was a mirage, it would probably not be because she had consciously checked off qualities her awareness did or did not have. Theories that include a robust account of hallucination are not only problematic because they assume that one is consciously aware of $E_1 \ldots E_n$ when one perceives. There is also the problem that this awareness implies a certain amount of infallibility: Sally has to be right that the hallucination has $E_1 \ldots E_n$ in order for it to be indiscriminable from veridical perception and for her to be correct in her assertions about her own state of mind. In a theory that endorses a robust account of hallucination, if the mirage of the well did not contain one of the $E_1 \ldots E_n$ features then Sally either did not mistake the mirage for a veridical perception or she was mistaken about mistaking the mirage for a veridical perception. The latter view seems unlikely as one usually assumes the perceiver to be an expert about how the world seems to her. So the endorser of the robust account of hallucination puts a lot of weight on her proposition that all hallucinations share the same features. If a hallucination does not have all of the features $E_1 \ldots E_n$ and the perceiver does not recognize $E_1 \ldots E_n$ as being present then, according to those endorsing a robust account of hallucination, the hallucination could not be mistaken for a veridical perception.
Why Martin’s Disjunctivism is the Preferable Account of Naïve Realism

Not only does the robust characterization of hallucination (what Martin calls the “immodest view”) have this improbable feature, but the view that does not give hallucination a robust account (what Martin calls the “modest view”) has advantages as to what it can say about perception that the immodest view does not. One cannot say that the modest view leaves anything out when characterizing hallucination. There is always the danger when forming an immodest view of hallucination that one will leave out a feature that is present in hallucination that makes it indiscriminable from veridical perception. After all, if one characterizes hallucination as having features $E_1\ldots E_n$ and someone experiences a hallucination containing $E_{n+1}$ but not $E_1\ldots E_n$ that is indistinguishable from veridical perception, then one must rethink one’s characterization. Similarly, one cannot argue that there is any feature of hallucination that is not included in the disjunctive characterization since the account by definition includes all hallucinations that are indiscriminable from veridical perception. These advantages of not giving a robust account of hallucination do not disprove those theorists who endorse the robust account, but they give reasons for favoring the disjunctive move unless a robust account of hallucination develops that does not fall into the pitfalls the disjunctivist avoids.

Johnston’s account of naïve realism takes a much different route than Martin’s. Johnston suggests that hallucination and veridical perception share a common element (sensible profiles) which accounts for their indistinguishability. However, hallucination and veridical perception are still inherently different. In this way Johnston hopes to stay true to the naïve realist’s notion that in cases of veridical perception the mind-independent object actually constitutes one’s thoughts while giving a satisfyingly robust account of hallucination.

Johnston maintains that in veridical perception one perceives a sensible profile (a grouping of various qualities such as color, shape, etc.) instantiated by a mind-independent object. In hallucination “the primary object…is somehow more qualitative than particularized, that it is individuated in terms of properties rather than in terms of particulars.” Johnston states that when one hallucinates one perceives universal kinds (such as redness, squareness, etc.) whereas when one veridically perceives one sees a mind-independent object that instantiates a particular sensible profile, a particular red and a particular square.

Johnston’s robust account of hallucination seems alluring to the naïve realist who wants to stay true to common sense. When one is experiencing a hallucination that is so vivid it is indistinguishable from veridical perception, it certainly seems as if there are robust phenomenal properties. When one hallucinates, there seems to be something before the mind that is the cause of one’s belief that one is veridically perceiving. If one were to push Sally about what she thinks she is perceiving when she is experiencing her mirage, she may say she is seeing the same shapes and colors that she would also see if she were experiencing a veridical perception. It seems intuitively accurate that what differentiates a hallucination from veridical perception is that in veridical perception what one perceives is instantiated by mind-independent objects. Otherwise, the sensory qualities (or “sensible profile”) of the hallucination and the corresponding veridical perception seem to be the same.

However, it is dangerous for the naïve realist to admit that veridical perception and hallucination share a common element besides their indistinguishability. Remember that the naïve realist does not want any phenomenal bottleneck filtering her experience of mind-independent objects. When she veridically perceives, she wants mind-independent objects to be constitutive of her experience of them. In other words, if I were a naïve realist I would not want it to be the case that my experience is filtered through any mind-dependent phenomena, whether it is my visual experience or some kind of sense data. Of course, Johnston thinks his theory is one in which my veridical perception of my pink laptop has the mind-independent laptop as a constituent in it. The sensible profile in veridical perception is a mind-independent instantiation, whereas the sensible profile in hallucination “is a mental act directed at sensible qualities and relations.” These qualities and relations that are perceived in hallucination are of the same kind as those experienced in veridical perception, but veridical perception is set apart because in that instance the qualities and relations are instantiated by particular objects. So if I were currently hallucinating my laptop, I would be experiencing that it is on top of a table and that it is pink, the same relation and qualities that would be present if I perceived it veridically. However, if I perceived my laptop veridically there would be a laptop instantiating its pinkness and an actual table instantiation of the laptop-on-top-of-table relation. In a hallucination, there would be no mind-independent objects that are causing the perceived sensible profile.

But this is problematic. Johnston says that when experiencing a sensible profile in hallucination one is experiencing universal qualities that merely seem to represent a particular instantiation, whereas in veridical perception one is actually seeing a particular instantiation. However, if the same sensible profile is present in cases of hallucination and veridical perception, a phenomenal bottleneck theorist could come in and say that what one is immediately aware of in veridical perception are the qualities that make up the sensible profile, the sensible qualities that are also present in hallucination. A phenomenal bottleneck theorist could take Johnston’s view and say that in veridical perception one is immediately aware of the sensible profile and only mediatly aware of the mind-independent object that happens to instantiate the sensible profile.

Johnston has some push-back against this worry. Though hallucination and veridical perception share the same sensible profile

the constitutional basis for the act of awareness involved in hallucination is the state of the hallucinator’s visual system, while the constitutional basis for seeing is…the state of the visual system plus the appropriate causal influence by external things.\(^\text{11}\)

It should be noted that the causal connection between mind-independent objects and our perception of them is not all that there is to veridical perception. Naïve realists believe that veridical perception is constituted by the mind-independent objects themselves, not the causal connection between mind-independent objects and one’s perception. However,

\(^{10}\) Ibid., 235.

\(^{11}\) Ibid., 230.
the right causal connection guarantees the visual channel is open so that direct visual
awareness of external things takes place. There are thus distinctively different acts of
awareness involved in hallucinating and seeing, individuated by different objects of
awareness.\footnote{Ibid.}

Johnston hopes to show that hallucination and veridical perception are inherently different because of
the innate particularity of veridical perception not present in hallucination. In veridical perception, mind-
independent objects cause one to perceive them whereas in hallucination there is no mind-independent
cause of one’s perception. Veridical perception and hallucination, Johnston argues, are inherently
different. However, if veridical perception and hallucination are inherently different, how can Johnston
account for the seamless transition one may experience between veridical hallucination and veridical
perception?

Let us say that Sally is sitting in front of my pink laptop but does not veridically perceive my laptop
because there is a machine which is giving her an uninstantiated sensible profile of my laptop in her mind
(or, a hallucination of my laptop). If the machine were removed from Sally’s brain and she was then able
to veridically perceive the laptop in front of her, she would not recognize that she had stopped
experiencing a hallucination of a laptop and was now experiencing a veridical perception. If veridical
perception and hallucination are so inherently different, then how can Johnston account for the
seamlessness between Sally’s veridical hallucination of the laptop and her veridical perception of it?

Of course, Johnston would say that this seamlessness may be accounted for through the sensible
profile that is the same in the hallucination and the veridical perception. Veridical perception and
hallucination seem the same because they have something in common, but there is a mind-independent
instantiation of the common element in the case of veridical perception which is not there in the case of
hallucination.

Up to this point in my paper I have explored the motivations and views of the perceptual bottleneck
theorists that question naïve realists and two conceptions of naïve realism which try to respond to the
criticises of the intentionalists and sense datum theorists. I have shown that both Martin’s disjunctivism
and Johnston’s common kind theory have their pros and cons. I will now try to determine which should
be preferred, concluding that Martin’s theory is the preferable account of naïve realism.

Since the motivation for naïve realism is common-sense intuitions, it would make sense to privilege
whichever view stays truest to our pre-philosophical intuitions. However, neither Martin’s nor Johnston’s
view is conclusively more intuitive than the other. Martin’s view does not provide a robust account of
hallucination, which goes against the intuition that there is something robust in hallucination that allows
us to mistake it for veridical perception. However, Martin presents a powerful argument against a robust
account of hallucination, arguing that it is against common sense to present a robust account of
hallucination because it implies infallibility in the perceiver. Since mature adults recognize that they are
often mistaken about their perceptions, surely it is not commonsensical to argue for an infallible
perceiver. That being said, Martin’s argument does not show that it is not also a common-sense intuition
that there is something robust in hallucination. One intuition found in common sense, either that there is a
robust account of hallucination or that perceivers cannot be infallible, must be given preference in order to determine which of these view is more commonsensical. Since which is more intuitive to common sense is not obvious to me, I will attempt to go another route to discover whether Johnston’s or Martin’s account of naïve realism is to be given preference.

The reason Martin and Johnston felt the need to defend naïve realism in the first place was because of critiques arising from the Argument from Hallucination. For this reason, it makes sense to give preference to whichever of these views is the more philosophically tenable in light of this argument. A naïve realist, in order to answer the phenomenal bottleneck theorists, must explain the seamless transition between veridical perception and veridical hallucination and in general the indistinguishability of hallucination from veridical perception. It is because of these observations that perceptual bottleneck theorists feel that they can take the mind-dependent element present in hallucination and argue that this “does the work” in both veridical perception and hallucination. If a naïve realist can effectively explain these observations without resorting to a mediate awareness of mind-independent objects in veridical perceptions then she will have a good strategy for defending naïve realism.

Both Martin and Johnston give explanations of perception that explain the seamless transition between hallucination and veridical perception and the indistinguishability between the two. Martin says that hallucination’s entire characterization consists in its indiscriminability from veridical perception. Johnston says that hallucination and veridical perception share a common feature, namely sensible profiles. As discussed previously, both of these theories adequately account for the seamless transition between veridical perception and hallucination and in general the indistinguishability of the two phenomena.

However, while both views explain the issues brought up by the Argument from Hallucination, Martin’s view more effectively blocks critiques from perceptual bottleneck theorists. Johnston maintains that his take on veridical perception requires mind-independent objects to be constitutive of our thoughts but yet the presence of a common kind in his theory is problematic. A perceptual bottleneck theorist could maintain that a sensible profile is all that one is immediately aware of in veridical perception and that one is only mediately aware of the mind-independent objects which instantiate them. While Johnston would obviously disagree with this argument, he does not provide a convincing rebuttal for why this could not be the case other than the fact that he does not think that would be in tune with how we feel we experience veridical perception. Martin, on the other hand, does not provide a robust account of hallucination and therefore it cannot be argued that his characterization of hallucination “does the work” in the case of veridical perception. While it is evident that veridical perception is indistinguishable from itself, it would be inaccurate to say that this fact is what one is immediately aware of. One is aware of how the veridical perception seems to one, not that it is indistinguishable from itself. When the laywoman sees my water bottle she thinks that it appears to her to be an orange water-containing device, not “My perception of this orange water-containing device is remarkably similar to itself.”

Because neither Martin nor Johnston’s view is obviously more in tune with common sense beliefs about perception, I decided to look down other avenues to discover which account of naïve realism should be preferred. Martin’s characterization of hallucination is less open to criticism from perceptual bottleneck theorists than Johnston’s. Since both philosophers want to argue against these indirect realists,
Why Martin’s Disjunctivism is the Preferable Account of Naïve Realism

it makes sense to favor Martin, the philosopher whose theory is less susceptible to being redefined as a perceptual bottleneck theory.

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