

## PHL340 Handout 9: Berkeley's Puzzle

### §1 The Puzzle

We began the course by learning about what contemporary philosophers have said about the *nature* of perceptual experience. We then pivoted to the *explanatory role* of perceptual experience. These two topics are connected.

Representationalists often claim that their account of perceptual experience best accommodates alleged explanatory symmetries between veridical, illusory, and hallucinatory experience.

For example, whether I undergo a veridical or an illusory experience as of a red mug, I seem equally entitled (or, more controversially, justified) in believing that there is a red thing before me. And if introspectively indiscriminable veridical and illusory experiences share their representational content—as representationalists insist they do—we have a symmetry at the level of experience that reflects the apparent symmetry at the level of belief.

John Campbell attacks representationalism, and defends direct realism (what he calls the 'relational view'), on the grounds that the latter view can, and the former view cannot, accommodate an important explanatory role of perceptual experience.

Perceptual experience, particularly visual experience, enables us to think *perceptual demonstrative thoughts* about ordinary objects. These are thoughts we form in response to the influx of perception, and which we standardly express with sentences such as 'that is red' and 'that is tall' and 'that is round'.

*Looking Ahead:* next week we're going to return to the relationship between perceptual experience and perceptual demonstrative thought when we read Declan Smithies and Imogen Dickie.

Central to Campbell's argument for direct realism (and against representationalism) is his claim that perceptual demonstrative thought about ordinary objects requires that we treat these objects as *mind-independent*.

Provisionally, let's say that something is mind-independent just if it is capable of existing unperceived.

Examples: ordinary objects—tables, chairs, and the like—seem clearly mind-independent. Matters become less clear when we talk about other entities. Are rainbows mind-independent? What about after-images? Numbers?

A version of mind-independence applies to properties (e.g. shape, size, colour, texture). Let's say that a property is mind-independent just if it is capable of being *instantiated* unperceived.

Examples: traditional 'primary' qualities like size and shape seem mind-independent (e.g. an object's shape isn't exhausted by its propensity to look a

certain way to us). What about colours? If you read the recommended Gareth Evans paper, you'll see him take up this question (cf. pp. 272-273). He thinks they are mind-dependent in at least one important sense.

Campbell expresses Berkeley's Puzzle as a simple question: 'how can experience of an object explain our grasp of the possibility of existence unperceived?' (p. 129)

A version of this question drives Strawson's discussion in Ch. 2 of *Individuals*. Gareth Evans, whose paper is a commentary on Strawson's chapter, provides an important bridge between Strawson and Campbell. We also saw Casey O'Callaghan discuss the closely related question of whether we perceive sounds as private or public.

The puzzle owes its name to famous 18<sup>th</sup> Century Anglo-Irish philosopher George Berkeley. As Campbell reconstructs it, the puzzle arises because philosophers wish to accommodate two attractive claims (the first about perceptual experience, the second about thought):

*Explanatory Role*: perceptual experience enables us to think about ordinary objects and their observable properties.

*Mind-Independence*: a subject counts as thinking about an ordinary object only if she treats the object as mind-independent.

'The pressure comes to a head over our grasp of concepts of ordinary physical objects, such as the tree in the quad. We think that various modal and temporal properties are possessed by such an object: that it could have existed even if no one had ever observed it, that it could have been in existence now even though it was currently unobserved, and that it continues to exist even at times at which it is in fact unobserved.' ('Berkeley's Puzzle', p. 129)

These two claims pose a problem for a theorist of perceptual experience once we combine them with a further assumption (one left largely unremarked in Campbell's discussion). The assumption, originally due to Berkeley and Locke, is that our treatment of objects as mind-independent must rest on our perceptual experience of these objects. This assumption was a product of their *empiricism*.

Given the empiricist assumption, the only way to respect *Explanatory Role* and *Mind-Independence* is to either (1) adopt an account of perceptual experience that permits subjects to treat perceived objects as mind-independent or (2) deny that we can think about mind-independent ordinary objects.

Berkeley remains infamous for his endorsement of (2). Campbell pursues (1), and argues that only direct realism permits subjects to treat perceived objects as mind-independent.

*Obvious question*: why accept the empiricist assumption that perceptual experience must underwrite our treatment of ordinary objects as mind-independent?

This question goes to the heart of Campbell's discussion. He assumes that perceptual experience plays a quite substantial role in explaining our capacity

to think about ordinary objects. Others disagree, and instead assign experience a necessary but relatively minimal explanatory role.

*Scholarly Aside:* Campbell has engaged in a long-running debate over Berkeley's Puzzle with Quassim Cassam. One major point of disagreement concerns precisely this question about the explanatory burden carried by perceptual experience.

Notice that an analogue of Berkeley's Puzzle arises for properties if we replace *Mind-Independence* with the claim that subjects can think about observable properties only if they treat the properties as mind-independent (i.e. as capable of unperceived instantiation).

*Question:* do you find this claim about properties as plausible as *Mind-Independence*? Again, take a look at pp. 272-273 of Evans's "Things Without the Mind". He argues that perceptual experience provides no grounds upon which to treat colours as mind-independent (and so counts as a kind of Berkeleyan about colour).

## §2 Refining Berkeley's Puzzle

With the general shape of Berkeley's Puzzle in hand, we're in a position to ask more fine-grained questions about what an answer to the puzzle would look like.

The most important question concerns *Mind-Independence* (i.e. the claim that a subject counts as thinking about an ordinary object only if she treats or 'grasps' the object as mind-independent): what is it for a subject to treat or grasp an object as mind-independent?

Campbell claims that treating an object as mind-independent is largely a 'procedural matter'. It involves engaging in certain patterns of reasoning or inference, which in turn requires that we regard these inferences as valid or compelling (cf. p. 138).

The relevant patterns of inference are those whose correctness presupposes that an object can persist despite shifts in a subject's experience of it, or gaps in observation, or differences in which sensory modality a subject uses to identify the object, or communication about an object with other subject.

'For example, there is the kind of reasoning you have to engage in when you want to demonstrate that this tree, seen here now, is the same one as the tree that you saw here yesterday... Or there is the kind of argument required to show that the tree I can see through this window is the same one as the tree I can see through that window.' (p. 137)

But Campbell thinks that merely being disposed to engage in certain types of inference does not suffice for grasp of an object as mind-independent. He has something like the following argument in mind:

1. A creature without experience could engage in the relevant inferences.
2. So if being disposed to engage in these inferences were sufficient for grasp of mind-independence, a creature without perceptual experience could grasp objects as mind-independent. [From 1]

3. But given the empiricist assumption, *Explanatory Role* and *Mind-Independence* together entail that perceptual experience plays an essential role in our capacity to grasp ordinary objects as mind-independent.
4. So either one of the claims that generates Berkeley's Puzzle is false, or grasp of mind-independent requires more than a mere disposition to engage in certain patterns of inference. [From 2 and 3]

*Scholarly Note:* this line of thought bears a striking similarity to John Searle's famous 'Chinese Room' thought experiment. Searle, like Campbell (and later Smithies and Dickie), wants to convince us that perceptual experience performs an important explanatory role in virtue of being a species of *conscious* awareness.

Campbell provides a similar argument against representationalist solutions to Berkeley's puzzle. He argues that representationalists cannot accommodate *Explanatory Role*, since they cannot tell us *why* perceptual representational content play an explanatory role (namely, explaining our grasp of objects as mind-independent) that other forms of representational content cannot play.

What our grasp of mind-independence requires, beyond a disposition to engage in certain inference patterns, is possession of some justification for these inference patterns (cf. pp. 138-140).

Campbell's claim is therefore that Berkeley's Puzzle puts pressure on a theorist of perceptual experience to explain how perceptual experience of ordinary objects justifies a subject's deployment of certain patterns of inference.

Here is how Campbell puts the point in his 2014 book (co-written with Quassim Cassam): 'There are two dimensions to grasp of a term referring to an ordinary physical object. There is, first, one's grasp of the characteristic patterns of inference to which the term is subject. There is, second, one's grasp of the justification for the use of those patterns of inference in connection with the term. That grasp of the semantic justification for the pattern of use of the term is what provides the most basic role of perceptual experience in our grasp of concepts relating to the medium-sized world' (*Berkeley's Puzzle*, p. 34)

If Campbell is right in thinking that the problem posed by Berkeley's Puzzle essentially concerns how perceptual experience justifies our treatment of ordinary objects as mind-independent, a solution to the puzzle will have two parts:

*Justification Component:* An account of what it would take for perceptual experience to justify the inference patterns that help constitute our grasp of objects as mind-independent.

*Experience Component:* An account of the nature of perceptual experience that permits experience to fulfill the explanatory role assigned by the *Justification Component*.

The *Justification Component* should remind you of the problem of perceptual justification. While Pryor, Siegel, and White were narrowly concerned with how perceptual experience justifies the beliefs we form in response to visual experience, the *Justification Component* is part of a wider project that seeks to explain how perceptual experience justifies a large range of activities (including the formation of beliefs about the external world in response to perceptual experience).

*Question:* could dogmatism be tweaked to provide a satisfactory answer to the *Justification Component*? What about reliabilism about perceptual justification?

Recall that Pryor's dogmatism extends immediate justification—justification that does not rest upon our justification for any other beliefs—only to those beliefs that share their representational content with perceptual experience. So it might be that this kind of dogmatism satisfies the requirements of the *Justification Component* only if perceptual experience itself represents the (presumably higher level) property of mind-independence.

*Further Question:* could Siegel's phenomenal contrast method be used to argue that visual experience represents objects as mind-independent?

*Scholarly Note:* Siegel actually does try to extend the method in her 2006 paper 'Subject and Object in the Contents of Visual Experience', though there she speaks of subject-independence rather than mind-independence.

In the next section we'll see how Campbell argues that only direct realism satisfies the requirements of the *Experience Component*. Yet one way to resist the argument, if you're not a direct realist, is to reject Campbell's preferred answer to the *Justification Component* (since it is from here that Campbell derives constraints on the *Experience Component*).

### §3 Campbell's Argument for Direct Realism

We're going to end with Campbell's argument for direct realism.

#### §3.1 Semantic Justification

Campbell's *Justification Component* adapts a justificatory structure originally developed to explain the correctness of the classical deductive inference rules governing logical constants.

If you've taken an introductory class in symbolic logic, you'll have seen how to construct truth tables that describe how the truth-values of sentences containing logical constants like 'and' and 'or' depend upon the truth-values of the sentences used to form the more complex sentences. For example, the sentence 'Elisabeth likes Wickham and Darcy despises Wickham' is true if and only if 'Elisabeth likes Wickham' and 'Darcy despises Wickham' are both true.

What truth tables describe are truth-functions that take as input the truth-values of the constituent sentences, and produce as output the truth-values of the complex sentences. For example, the truth-function associated with 'and' takes the pair <True, True> and maps it to <True>, but maps every other True/False pair to <False>.

In deductive logic, an inference is correct only if it is valid. Because which inferences count as valid will depend upon the truth-functions that belongs to the logical constants involved in the inferences, when someone learns a constant's truth-function she acquires the grounds upon which to discriminate between correct and incorrect inferences involving the constant. Campbell calls this the acquisition of a *semantic justification* for inference rules involving the logical constant.

How might we adapt this model to the *Justification Component*? Campbell's answer:

*Semantic Justification*: In presenting a subject with an ordinary object, perceptual experience provides (a) knowledge of an object, and (b) this object determines standards of 'good order' or 'correctness' for inferences concerning the object.

Hence the role of perceptual experience on Campbell's *Justification Component* is to provide knowledge of an ordinary object, where this object performs the same standard-setting role as truth-functions play in the case of logical constants.

### §3.2 Direct Realism

Direct realism (what Campbell calls the 'relational view') is an account of the phenomenal character of perceptual experience.

*Direct Realism (a.k.a. the Relational View, etc.)*: the phenomenal character of a veridical perceptual experience consists in the external world objects and properties the experience presents, together with the perceiving subject's perspective on these objects and properties.

From a metaphysical point of view, direct realists characterize perceptual experience as a three-place *relation* between an observer, a perceptual perspective, and the elements of an external scene (i.e. objects and their properties).

Campbell argues that direct realism is uniquely suited to play the role imposed on perceptual experience by *Semantic Justification*. Because it treats perceptual experience as a relation to the ordinary object one perceives, direct realism gets to say that perceptual experience justifies our treatment of ordinary objects as mind-independent in virtue of presenting mind-independent objects that serve as semantic justification for patterns of inference which constitute our grasp of these objects as mind-independent. Yet unlike representationalism, direct realism can treat the 'aboutness' of perceptual experience as fundamentally different in kind from the representation characteristic of thought.

Ordinary objects thus play a fundamental justificatory role on Campbell's picture. For example, at the end of his paper he argues against those who treat ordinary objects as theoretical posits meant to explain perceived regularities (much as scientists posit unobservable particles or forces to explain observable phenomena). He argues that these theorists get the justificatory order backwards. Our awareness of object-like regularities does not entitle us to posit objects to explain them; rather, we're entitled to classify certain regularities as object-like only *because of our prior grasp of ordinary objects*.