

# A Virtue Aistheology

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November 6, 2013

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## Introduction<sup>1</sup>

It is widely accepted that having a perceptual experience is a matter of being in a state that represents the world to be a certain way. What it is to see, and more generally to perceive, is explained in terms of the content of such experiences, and perhaps further causal relations between perceptual experiences and the environment. This is an *experience-first* orientation in the philosophy of perception, and I shall argue for its rejection. Instead, we should pursue a *perception-first* aistheology (study of perception).<sup>2</sup> By investigating what it is to perceive things as they are directly, we can better understand perception, perceptual experience, and their places in the natural world.

Others have argued for the rejection of experience-first aistheology. Disjunctivists, for example, deny that perceiving things as they are can be understood in terms of a perceptual experience common to perceiving things as they are and hallucinating.<sup>3</sup> However, these theorists are largely silent on substantive questions in the philosophy of perception, or explicitly endorse quietist methodological claims, for example that philosophers of perception should not try to provide a substantive account of the nature

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<sup>1</sup>Thanks to...

<sup>2</sup>Surprisingly, there is no word for the study of perception as there is for the study of knowledge (epistemology). I've made one up in order to draw parallels with virtue epistemology, and hope that it will catch on. The spelling is intended to eliminate possible confusion with "aesthetics", another term from the same greek word ("aisthesis"), meaning clear perception.

of perception, its relation to illusion and hallucination, or how it obtains in virtue of non-mental facts. These two methodological commitments are divorcible. One can be a perception-firster without being a quietist about such issues. In this paper I present such a perception-first theory, and show how it can provide plausible resolutions to some central problems in the philosophy of perception.

Experience-firsters traditionally invoke representational facts to provide a substantive theory of the nature of perception and perceptual experience, one that generates a research program in which features of perception and experience can be investigated.<sup>4</sup> Are there any tools that perception-firsters might appeal to, tools that do not try to explain perception in terms of other mental or intentional states but still generate a similarly fruitful research program?<sup>5</sup> I shall argue that perception-firsters can invoke *competences* to do just this. I call the view I will defend *direct virtue aistheology*.<sup>6</sup> According to direct virtue aistheology, perceiving things as they are is a matter of manifesting a competence to perceive things.

The view is *direct* (and perception-first) because it claims that perceiving is a manifestation of a competence to perceive, not to do something else in terms of which perceiving is to be analyzed, such as veridically representing. That is, there is no more metaphysically fundamental *person-level* perceptual phenomenon than perceiving. Perceiving, on this approach, is a kind of activity in which the perceiver is directed at what she sees as the *target* of her activity. The perceptual relation is thus a species of the agent-target relation. Although perception cannot be specified in terms of other mental states, by invoking competences and explaining certain features of such perceptual competences, the perception-firster can develop a substantive and fruitful naturalistic research program.<sup>7</sup>

The paper consists of four sections. In the first section I explain the

<sup>4</sup>Some disjunctivists are also representationalists. I will discuss this position below.

<sup>5</sup>One might think that perception-firsters could or should appeal to representation as well, and hold that the contents of perceptual experience differ in the good and bad cases... .

<sup>6</sup>Direct virtue aistheology shares many of the features of my direct virtue epistemology (Chapter 3).

<sup>7</sup>As will become clear, I think that the facts in virtue of which we possess and manifest competences include sub-personal representational and computational facts. The key thesis here is that the first-personal directedness of perceptually experiencing should not be understood in representational terms, not that representational facts may have no role to play in making perceptual experiences occur.

basic idea of direct virtue aistheology and the account of competences that it invokes, and in each subsequent section I investigate a traditional dilemma for a theory of perception and show how direct virtue aistheology provides a novel and satisfactory way of resolving it. In section 2, I explain how direct virtue aistheology provides a way of understanding how causal and other natural relations to one's environment may constitute perceptual directedness without falling prey to Berkeleian skepticism. In section 3, I show how direct virtue aistheology explains how perceptual experience is nonconceptual in a way that makes clear how it can rationalize beliefs. In section 4, I show how direct virtue aistheology can both explain how perceiving things as they are is a kind of direct cognitive contact with one's environment, but nevertheless illusions and hallucinations may be subjectively indiscriminable from such contact. I will not do much to defend the importance of resolving these dilemmas in what follows. Their centrality to recent work on perception should suffice.

## 1 Direct Virtue Aistheology

Direct virtue aistheology claims that perceiving is a matter of manifesting a competence to perceive. In order to clarify this position, we need to get clearer on what competences to perceive and their manifestations are. A perception-first virtue aistheology requires a perception-first account of perceptual competences.<sup>8</sup> The account I endorse differs from the two main existing approaches, in the way one might expect.

The dominant view is an experience-first view on which a subject perceives in virtue of exercising perceptual competences (abilities/ capacities) to veridically perceptually represent. Exercises of competences are cases of perceptually representing (which is taken to be or constitute perceptual experiencing). Perception is then explained in terms of an exercise of such a competence, veridical representation, and perhaps further causal relations.<sup>9</sup> Illusions and hallucinations are cases where the competence is exercised—and so the subject has an experience with a representational content—but for some reason either the content is false or the experience fails to bear the right causal relations to the subject's environment.

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<sup>8</sup>What follows is the application of my *dual exercise account* (Miracchi (Chapter 1)) to the case of knowledge.

<sup>9</sup> Burge. Schellenberg.

This account is powerful for many reasons, not least of which because it allows for a plausible account of the indiscriminability of cases of illusion and hallucination. If the perceptions and hallucinations involve the same exercise of perceptual competences, and the subjective character of experience is determined by the exercise of one's perceptual competences, then clearly hallucinations and illusions can be indiscriminable from perceiving things as they are because they involve the same kind of exercise of competence.

On the other hand, there are those who reject this experience-first approach and instead claim that perceptual competences (capacities/abilities) are competences to perceive things as they are.<sup>10</sup> This approach, however, remains silent on the nature of illusions and hallucinations, and their relation to perceiving things as they are. Instead, we need an account of perceptual competences on which they have some exercises that are cases of perceiving things as they are, but are nevertheless *fallible*; that is, such competences can also have exercises that are failures to perceive things as they are.<sup>11</sup> If there is an account of this sort, then we can use it to explain how cases of perceiving things as they are are one kind of exercise of a competence to perceive, while cases of illusion and hallucination are the other kind of exercise.

More precisely, the account I will present is an account of competences to perceive things of certain kinds, on which exercises of such competences are either constitutively cases of perceiving things of those kinds or constitutively failures to perceive things of those kinds.<sup>13</sup> (I will show in sections 3 and 4 how such an account of competences to perceive things of certain kinds suffices to explain what it is to perceive or experience things *as being of* certain kinds.)

All we need are three fairly simple necessary conditions. To begin, let us suppose that we are placing conditions on a competence  $C_{PF}$  to perceive F things. Perceptual competences may for example be competences

<sup>10</sup>Millar on recognitional abilities, McD often interpreted this way but this is bad. Campbell?

<sup>11</sup> On the first approach, competences (capacities/abilities/methods) are fallible and their exercises are non-factive (e.g. Burge, Greco, Schellenberg, Sosa), while on the second competences are infallible and their exercises are factive (e.g. Millar, McDowell, Williamson).<sup>12</sup>

<sup>13</sup>The account I invoke here is an application of a more general account of competences I develop in Miracchi (Chapter 1).

to see to see bounded, rigid, moving objects, to hear glass shattering, to see faces, and so on.<sup>14</sup> We may associate with such a competence  $C_{PF}$  a way of perceiving  $W_{CPF}$ , which is its characteristic manifestation. For example, the competence to see bounded, rigid, moving objects has seeing a bounded, rigid, moving object as its characteristic manifestation.<sup>15</sup> We may then specify the *manifestation conditions* of  $C_{PF}$ , which are the conditions that in a particular case (against a background of possession of  $C_{PF}$ ) constitute seeing an  $F$  in way  $W_{CPF}$ :

**Manifestation Conditions:** The manifestation conditions of  $C_{PF}$  are whatever operations of subpersonal cognitive and bodily mechanisms and external conditions together (against a background of possession of  $C_{PF}$ ) constitute a particular case of perceiving an  $F$  in the way characteristic of the competence ( $W_{CPF}$ ).

A competence to perceive is **manifested** just in case its manifestation conditions obtain.

Clearly, this condition is not very informative. The point of specifying the manifestation conditions is not to illuminate *them*, but to explain how there may be fallible competences *to perceive things*, and so to explain how competences to perceive could have two kinds of exercises, ones that are cases of perceiving things (characteristic manifestations) and ones that are cases of failing to perceive things.

Of the manifestation conditions, we may isolate just the subpersonal cognitive and bodily mechanisms (e.g. ocular mechanisms) whose operations in a particular case partially constitute the subject's perceiving an  $F$  in way  $W_{CPF}$ :<sup>16</sup>

**Basis Condition:** The basis of  $C_{PF}$  is fully constituted by the subpersonal cognitive and/or bodily mechanisms of the subject  $S$  whose operations partially constitute  $S$ 's perceiving an  $F$  in way  $W_{CPF}$ .

<sup>14</sup>I remain neutral in this paper on which properties we see objects as having.

<sup>15</sup>Probably competences to know will be much more fine-grained, but I simplify here for the sake of exposition.

<sup>16</sup>Cite stuff. Ask Ron.

I may also remain non-committal about the nature of these mechanisms and their operations, but it is important to point out that direct virtue aistheology is fully compatible with scientific computational accounts of perceptual cognitive mechanisms. There is no reason why a perception-first, or anyone who denies that having a perceptual experience *is* a matter of being in a state with a certain representational content, need deny that perception *is constituted* in part by the operations of sub-personal computational cognitive mechanisms.<sup>17</sup> The key thesis I wish to defend here is first-personal directedness of perception and perceptually experiencing is not a matter of that experience's having a representational content, not that representational facts may have no role to play in making perceptions and perceptual experiences occur.<sup>18</sup>

Just by distinguishing the basis of a competence to perceive from its manifestation conditions, we now have the resources to impose a different kind of reliability condition on perceptual competences than is normally imposed, and so to explain how competences to perceive may be fallible. Instead of supposing that the central condition on perceptual competences is that their exercises must be likely to veridically represent, we may suppose that it must be sufficiently likely that whenever the sub-personal cognitive and bodily mechanisms that constitute the basis of the competence are operative (perhaps as described by a computational theory), the conditions constitutive of perceiving also obtain:

**Proficiency Condition:** The proficiency condition of  $C_{PF}$  requires that the objective probability of the manifestation conditions obtaining conditional on the basis of the competence being operative be sufficiently high. I.e.,  $Pr(M|O_B) \geq n$ , for some sufficiently high  $n \in (0, 1]$ .<sup>19,20</sup>

<sup>17</sup>I discuss this in detail in Miracchi (Chapter 2a).

<sup>18</sup>Section 2 further clarifies this claim.

<sup>19</sup>For ease of exposition, I am representing the threshold as a real number  $n \in (0, 1]$ , but I need not make any commitments about how close to 1  $n$  must be, whether the threshold for the epistemic domain is the same as for other domains (e.g. baseball), or whether the threshold is determinate. (I think it is probably indeterminate.) I also need not make any commitments about whether the threshold is context-sensitive.

<sup>20</sup>While I need not commit to a particular view of probability here, I am supposing that appeal to objective conditional probabilities is less contentious than appeal to objective unconditional probabilities (see Hájek (2007) for defense of this claim), and I am supposing that some kind of non-frequentist realist account of them is in the offing. I

Putting these three conditions together, we arrive at the following account of perceptual competences. The proficiency condition relates the manifestation conditions to its basis, so that instead of the competence being characterized by a relation between (e.g.) a visual representation/experience and its truth/accuracy, a perceptual competence is characterized by a relation between the conditions constitutive of perceiving and their subpersonal “internal” proper part. Thus perceptual competences are competences to perceive, not to do anything else, such as veridically represent.

Moreover, *what it is* for a subject to perceive things of a certain kind *just is* for her to manifest a competence to see things of that kind, because only if the manifestation conditions are related to the basis of the competence in the way specified by the proficiency condition do manifestation conditions constitute cases of seeing. (That was the reason for the caveat about background conditions in the specification of the manifestation conditions above.) Whereas on the traditional view perception was characterized in terms of perceptual representation and further conditions (e.g. veridical representation in the right causal conditions), on the account just outlined perceptions just are exercises of competence.

Thus we have a view on which perceptual competences are competences to perceive things of certain kinds, and they have perceiving things of that kind as one kind of exercise. The proficiency condition also allows for another kind of exercise, one that is constitutively a failure. Because the proficiency condition does not require that the probability of the manifestation conditions obtaining conditional on the basis being operative be 1, the basis of a competence to perceive may be operative even if the full manifestation conditions fail to obtain. In such cases, we may suppose that such competences are *degenerately exercised*:

A competence to see is **degenerately exercised** just in case its basis is operative, but not all of the manifestation conditions obtain.

Finally, we may suppose that if either of these cases obtain, the competence is *exercised*:

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am also supposing that such probabilities are true at particular times. Changes in, e.g., causal regularities over time might result in either the acquisition or loss of competences to perceive by changing whether or not the proficiency condition is met.

A competence is to see is **exercised** just in case it is either manifested or degenerately exercised.

On direct virtue aistheology, cases of perceiving and cases of hallucination are both exercises of competences to perceive, but it is hopefully clear that perception is prior to hallucination, and that they share no common exercise of competence. This is because hallucination counts as a perceptual state only because it is a degenerate exercise of a competence to perceive. We can now more precisely state direct virtue aistheology:

### Direct Virtue Aistheology

- (i) All competences to perceive have bases, manifestation conditions, and a proficiency condition relating them of the sort specified above.
- (ii) For any case of **perceiving**  $p$ ,  $p$  is a manifestation of some competence  $C_{PF}$  to perceive.
- (iii) For any case of **hallucination**  $h$ ,  $h$  is a degenerate exercise of some competence  $C_{PF}$  to see.
- (iv) For any case of a subject having a **perceptual experience**  $e$ ,  $e$  is an exercise of some competence  $C_{PF}$  to see (i.e. it is either a manifestation or a degenerate exercise of some competence  $C_{PF}$  to see).

(Cases of **illusion** will be treated in section 4.)

Degenerate exercises are not neutral exercises of competence. They are constitutively failures. According to direct virtue aistheology, cases of hallucination are degenerate exercises of competences to perceive; they are constitutively failures to perceive.<sup>21</sup>

Rather than going into the view in more detail at this point, I think it will be better to begin looking at traditional problems for a theory of perception, and to see how direct virtue aistheology can deliver simple and plausible resolutions to these problems.

<sup>21</sup>Cases of illusion will be treated in section 4.

## 2 Perceptual Perspectives and Berkeley's Challenge

The kind of experience-first approach I wish to reject has a very plausible starting point.<sup>22</sup> The idea is that in having perceptual experiences we seem to be aware of our environments because of causal relations we bear to our environments. The line of thinking then proceeds to more precisely state this claim as the claim that in having perceptual experiences we seem to be aware of our environments because of causal relations between our *perceptual experiences* and our environments. These causal relations establish representational facts between our experiences and our environments, and we seem to see things as being a certain way because our experiences represent them to be that way.<sup>23</sup> This approach to explaining the directness of perceptual experience in a naturalistic way is as old as Locke's (1690/1975), and so is what many take to be the central challenge to it.

Berkeley argued that even if all of the causal relations were as Locke supposed, they would not suffice to explain how *perceivers* have experiences that are as of their environments.<sup>24</sup> We may suppose that all of the causal relations are as the representationalist supposes. How could such causal facts account for the perceiver's having a perspective on her environment? Causal relations seem to have properties that make them ill-suited to this task. They are contingent relations which obtain between metaphysically independent entities. Why should the fact that a certain state of affairs caused the subject to have one experience rather than another suffice to make her aware, or seem to be aware, of its cause? Why should being in a state which is merely contingently related to the subject's environment suffice to make *her* be perceptually aware of her environment? Here Campbell and Evans express the worry:

Here is one way to put Berkeley's Puzzle: merely appealing to

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<sup>22</sup>While there are other experience-first approaches than representationalism, I shall focus in this paper on how direct virtue aistheology provides an alternative to experience-first representationalism, because it is the dominant approach. I will discuss disjunctivist representationalism below as well.

<sup>23</sup>Millikan, Dretske count too, as well as more mainstream people like Fodor, etc... . Nearly all representationalists about perception think something like this is right.

<sup>24</sup>There have been several variations of this argument in recent years (Searle, Evans, McDowell, Campbell, Travis), but for our purposes, we may treat the argument as unified. Travis (2013), p. 2.

the idea of experience as sensations caused in us by the world will not explain how it is that we have the idea of physical objects as the subjects of external interventions [i.e. as mind-independent objects].

—Campbell (2011), p. 37

According to the Photograph Model, on the other hand, what determines which particular object a mental state represents is facts about the mental state's causal ancestry, quite independent of anything we could recognize as discriminating knowledge, on the subject's part, of the object in question—facts, indeed, of which the subject himself may be quite unaware. And it is quite obscure how, if one mental state represents a particular in virtue of one sort of causal relation to it, and another mental state represents a particular in virtue of another sort of causal relation to it, that the sheer difference between the causal relations could generate a difference in *content* between the two mental states, given that it need not impinge on the subject's awareness.

—Evans (1982), p. 83

Berkeley's challenge has remained a central difficulty for naturalistic theories of perception, and there are only two kinds of responses to it, neither of which is satisfactory. On the one hand, one may hold onto representationalism by eschewing problems about the perceiver's perspective or supposing that because representationalism seems like the only plausible naturalistic view, that there must somehow be a solution.<sup>25,26</sup> On the other hand, one may reject representationalist naturalistic approach in favor of trying to capture facts about the subject's perspective, by either embracing idealism (Berkeley), or espousing the claim that perception is a matter of primitive openness to one's environment (Campbell, McDowell) about which little more can be said.

Put so starkly, it should be clear that neither of these responses is satisfactory. As long as it is both plausible that perceptual directedness obtains in virtue of the natural, mind-independent facts and that it is a matter of having a distinctively first-personal perspective one one's environment,

<sup>25</sup>Pretty much everybody. Fregeans.

<sup>26</sup>(Burge, Fodor, ...).

taking either horn or trying to ignore the problem at best leads to ideological entrenchment, with those who think naturalism should be defended on all costs on the one side, and with those who think the same of perspectival facts.

How might we make our way out of this stalemate, so that more satisfactory options become available? I think that the difficulty is not with causal relations *per se*, as the quotes from Campbell and Evans above might lead one to believe, but with the way of “precisifying” the intuitive starting point we began with. The representationalist replaces the intuitive claim that we have experiences as of our environments because of causal relations we bear to our environments by replacing it with the claim that we have experiences as of our environments because our *experiences* bear causal relations to our environments. This move already supposes that experiences are metaphysically independent of one’s environment, making space for Berkeleyan challenges to arise. What we need is a way of explaining how causal (and other naturalistic) relations can constitute the nature of perceptual experiences themselves so as to make perceivers directed at the world when they have them.<sup>27</sup>

## 2.1 Genuinely Constitutive Causal Relations

Direct virtue aistheology takes at face value the intuitive idea we began with, that causal relations make perceivers visually aware of what is in their environments. It does not try to analyze this relation in terms of a

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<sup>27</sup>It is worth noting before moving on to develop this idea, that representationalism is intrinsically tied up with this experience-first approach that creates these Berkeleyan difficulties. Of course on the representationalist approach an experience that represents that *o* is *F* is partially constituted by whatever causal or other facts establish the representational relation between the experience and that *o* is *F*. However, the representational relation is also a contingent relation that in general obtains between two metaphysically independent entities, the representans and the representatum, with the same objectionable result that a person is perceptually directed at what she is only in virtue of having an experience which bears the appropriate contingent relations to what it represents. We may put Berkeley’s challenge in just these terms: suppose that the representational facts are exactly as the representationalist suggests. Why should those facts constitute, or be a matter of, the perceiver being direct at what her experience represents? (Searle’s Chinese Room Argument may be understood as making exactly this point, although he did not intend the worry to be as general as I am presenting it here.) If the skeptical worries arise because causal relations have these features, they will also arise for *any* representational theory, for representational relations have exactly the same problematic features.

relation between experiences and environments. But how instead are we to think of this relation, and how causal facts give rise to it? Perception, according to direct virtue aistheology, is a kind of activity, an activity essentially performed by a perceiver. What the perceiver perceives is the *target* of this activity, not what is represented by her experience. Perception is thus a species of the more general kind activity-with-a-target.

What is it to say that perceiving is an activity, and, more specifically, an exercise of competence? Perceiving is clearly not an *intentional action* in the sense normally meant by philosophers. Intentional actions are often thought to be things that we decide whether to do, reflect upon our reasons for so doing, are subject to “Why?” questions, etc. It is highly implausible that seeing satisfies these requirements. However, it is equally implausible that all activities with aims and targets that satisfy these requirements. For example, when many non-human animals perform the activities of eating, mating, fleeing, hunting, etc., we think that they engage in purposeful activities with targets (food, mates, predators, prey, etc.,) even though these animals perhaps do not perform intentional actions in this more robust sense.

Indeed, even in some human cases where these further features are absent, it is highly plausible that the humans are performing purposeful, targeted, activities. For example, we still count the addict as lighting up her cigarette even though she does it on impulse, reflectively rejects this action, and would rather not perform it. She still counts as the agent of her activity; she still acts with the purpose of lighting up her cigarette, and the cigarette is still the target of her activity. It is this very basic sense of activity that I mean when I claim that perceiving is a kind of activity. Perception is among the activities that animals (including ourselves) just do, often whether we want to or not, and without much control over when and how we do it.<sup>28</sup>

The sort of agency required to provide an account of perceptual directedness is not *spontaneity* as Berkeley, Kant, and McDowell supposed, but rather, it is just engaging with mind-independent objects as targets of one’s activities. There are some things that animals (including ourselves) just do, whose status as doings is neither derived from (the possibility of) reflection or deliberation about what to do, nor from the possibility of do-

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<sup>28</sup>There is, however, a gray area here. We can decide where to look and what to think about, and we can have reasons for doing so.

ing otherwise, nor from being caused “appropriately” by certain mental states that represent the doing. Some doings have aims just in virtue of being the kinds of doings that they are.

If we can make it plausible that non-mental facts and environmental relations can constitute activities of this sort, then we will indeed be able to positively characterize the seeing relation without incurring Berkeley’s worries. This is because, whereas the representans-representatum relation involves a representans (i.e. an experience) that is independently specifiable from the representatum (content), activities of the kind we are concerned with cannot be specified independently of their targets. (For example, eating requires that the agent ingest food with the aim of eating it. If there is no food she ingests with this aim, then she is not eating.)

We can invoke competences in order to make it plausible that non-mental facts and environmental relations can constitute activities of this sort. According to direct virtue aistheology, it is the fact that seeing is a manifestation of competence that explains its status as a doing, as well as the nature of the agent’s engagement with her environment. Causal and other non-normative regularities, instead of making it the case that a mental state represents that *p* when tokened, make it the case that the agent possesses and manifests a competence to see.

To put it in terms of the account of perceptual competences outlined in section 1, causal regularities (and other natural facts) establish the proficiency condition (and perhaps other necessary conditions), while particular causal occurrences make the the case that the manifestation conditions obtain or fail to obtain, and so that the subject perceives or fails to perceive. There is no way of isolating the “experience” in isolation from these causal relations, because perceptual experiences are either constitutively cases of perceiving or constitutively failures to perceive.

In summary, direct virtue aistheology allows for a straightforward explanation of how causal facts metaphysically determine a perceiver’s relation to what she perceives in a way that successfully responds to Berkeleyan skepticism. By conceiving of that relation as an agent-target relation, as opposed to an experiencer-experience-representatum relation, we deny that an experience may have a status qua mental without bringing facts about perceptual directedness. Second, by invoking competences, we can suppose that causal facts establish perceptual relations because are constitutive of competence possession and manifestation, not constitutive of representational relations between experiences and representata. There is

thus no room for the distinction between the mental state that is the perceiver's experience and the facts that make the experience represent what it does that engenders Berkeleyan skepticism.

### 3 The Nonconceptuality of Perception

It has seemed to many quite implausible that our perceptual capacities are as sophisticated as our thought capacities—that perceptual experiences themselves involve the application of concepts to what we see. A standard (and plausible) way of understanding this claim is that perception does not involve *predication* of the kind thought involves. The capacity for predication seems to be a kind of capacity that is too sophisticated to be operative in perception. At a minimum, predicating *F*-ness of an object seems to require that one be able to independently identify the object in question, but in perception it seems that what properties one sees an object as having help you to see the object at all.<sup>29,30</sup> But if one thinks—as many suppose—that what it is like to perceive an object is fully determined by the content of the perception, then one seems forced into thinking of *seeing as* as involving some kind of attribution or predication. What else could seeing *a* as *F* be except the entertaining of some content to the effect that *a is F*, and how can this not involve predicating *F*-ness of *a*?

Many people have tried to reject the idea that perceptual experience involves predication by claiming that in experience properties are *attributed* in some kind of nonconceptual way.<sup>31</sup> But this is an unhappy position, for the grip we have on attribution is the kind of attribution of a property to an object independently referred to. It is thoroughly unclear what this kind of non-conceptual attribution is, or how, though less cognitively demanding than conceptual attribution, it could play a similar role in rationalizing beliefs.<sup>32</sup> Positive explications of this idea have not been forthcoming.

There is, however, an alternative. David Kaplan, who, while mainly concerned with indexical expressions such as *here* and *now*, was also clearly

<sup>29</sup>BURGE.

<sup>30</sup>Depending on who you talk to, predication requires a lot more than this. Evans. Sellars, McDowell. CITE.

<sup>31</sup>Burge, Block?

<sup>32</sup>McDowell (1994), Brewer (1999).

concerned with the kind of thoughts such expressions paradigmatically express. He argued for a position on which the *contents* of indexical thoughts are just the objects that those thoughts are about, but that the facts in virtue of which one thinks of such things directly determine what it is rational to believe or do on the basis of such thinking.

These *metasemantic* facts could be functionally described, he thought, and the functional descriptions could help us to understand the rational role of a thought so determined. So, for example, the facts in virtue of which one thinks of a particular place as *here* may be characterized as a function from a context of thinking to the place of thinking. In other words, the *here* thought is about the thing that it is because it is the place in which the thinking takes place.

Kaplan thought that the properties of an object that in a particular context of thinking/utterance determine what one is thinking/talking about could directly make it rational for one to believe and act as though the object had that property. Rather than such metasemantic facts making a difference to what it is rational to believe or do on the basis of thinking *here* thoughts by generating the attribution of *being the place where I am* to the place one is thinking of, the seeming presentness and placehood of the place one thinks of as *here* is a feature of one's *way* of thinking of the place, and not something one could exercise independently of one's thinking about the object.<sup>33</sup>

While Kaplan's formal treatment of indexicals has been widely influential, this idea about what explains rational relations among mental states has been largely ignored. This is, I think, because if one holds that the rational contribution of a mental state is exhausted by its representational content, it is difficult to see how *metasemantic* facts could make a difference to one's mental life without making a difference to what content one entertains.

However, the direct virtue aistheologist has a straightforward way of understanding how the facts in virtue of which one sees an object might make a difference to the *way* in which one sees an object, and so what it is rational to believe and do on the basis of so perceiving. We may think of Kaplan's functional descriptions of how reference is determined as just functional descriptions of competences. On this construal, Kaplan's claim amounts to the claim that the properties of the object exploited by the

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<sup>33</sup>See esp. Kaplan (1989), pp. 774-5.

competence exercised in referring to it can make a difference to the *way* in which one thinks about it because they make a difference to the nature of the competence exercised.

Direct virtue aistheology can adopt precisely this approach in explaining how perception of *an F* can be perception of *an F as such*. On direct virtue aistheology, what it is to see *a* as *F* is for *a* to be the target of one's exercise of competence to see *F* things. But a competence to see *F*-things is not a competence to attribute *F*-ness to what one sees, just as a competence to think about the place where one is is not a competence to attribute being the place where one is to a particular place. To exercise a competence to see *F*-things is just to see things of a certain kind, just as to exercise a competence to think about the place where one is is to think about a certain kind of place.

When one exercises a competence to see *F* things, however, the fact that the competence that is exercised is a competence to see *F* things determines the *way* in which one thinks about the object. Recall the account of perceptual competences developed in section 1. For every competence  $C_{PF}$  to perceive an *F* there is a characteristic manifestation of the competence  $W_{CPF}$  that is constituted by the manifestation conditions on a particular occasion. We can now suppose that this way of seeing an object is seeing the object *as F*, because the competence is a competence to see *F* things.

Importantly, it is facts about the character of the perceptual competence exercised, i.e. stable features of the competence, that determine what one sees objects as, not actual properties exploited on a particular occasion. Direct virtue aistheology thus differs from *naive realist* accounts in that seeing an object as *F* is does not involve the same kind of relation to *F*-ness as it does to objects. The object is the target of the seeing activity. Seeing an object as *F* is just a way of seeing an object, a way that is perceptually sensitive to its being *F*.

Why is this view a nonconceptual account of perception? Although thoughts about oneself, and the here and now, are conceptual, there is no reason why one might not have competences to see, where the properties exploited by the competence determine what one sees things as, without having any competences to attribute properties to object independently referred to. According to direct virtue aistheology, perception neither involves the attribution of properties to objects nor requires that perceivers have higher order abilities to attribute properties to objects seen. This is

a clear sense in which perception is nonconceptual, and in which agents may be perceivers but not thinkers. Thus direct virtue aistheology provides an account of how perception may be nonconceptual without appealing to obscure notions like "non-conceptual attribution" or "conceptualization".

The direct virtue aistheologist's account of *seeing as* respects another intuition about perceptual experience that Tyler Burge has been at pains to point out, namely that the role of properties in perceptual experience seems to be identificatory as opposed to predicative. He tries to explain this by appeal to two different kinds of attribution—as in *that F* versus *that is F*. But it is not clear how to interpret this idea, for when we usually say "that green cup", we give our interlocutors a description that helps them identify what we want to talk about, but which they could already identify prior to the description. Burge merely claims that there is a kind of non-conceptual, identificatory, attribution, but does not give any support for this claim, other than the observation that we see things *as* having properties and that on the assumptions that perception is nonconceptual and that it is representational is true there must be attribution of this kind.

In contrast, on direct virtue aistheology it is quite clear how the properties one sees a thing as having play an identificatory role. Indeed, that is the whole point. The properties that one sees a thing as having are the properties that, in the case where one manifests a competence, make it the case that one is and continues to perceive the object.

Many people worry that only if perceptual experience were conceptual could it rationalize beliefs.<sup>34</sup> But direct virtue aistheology can avoid the problems typically raised for the view. Let us briefly return to the analogy with indexical thoughts. Consider the following inference:

**Singular**

- (1) Here is a beautiful statue.
- (2) There is a place at where a beautiful statue is located.

This is a rational inference, in virtue of the way in which the subject thinks about the place she is referring to as *here*. That is, for subjects that in fact do have the concept of *being a place*, the kind of sensitivity one has in thinking about an object as *here* rationalizes the belief, of the object thought about, that it is a place. Note that the explanation of why it is

<sup>34</sup>I argue against the positive proposals such people endorse in Miracchi (Chapter 2b).

rational to infer the existential claim that somewhere there is beautiful statue from the claim that here there is a beautiful statue does not rely on the fact that “is a beautiful statue” is predicated in both cases. What explains the rationality of the move from a *here* thought to an existential claim about some place are facts about how one thinks about the place one thinks of as *here*. Nothing about this explanation requires the possibility of predicating properties of what one thinks of as *here*. If this is true in the case of indexicals then there is no reason why it should not be true in the case of perception.

The analogy with indexical thoughts also supports the idea that the kind of perspectival sensitivity one has to the properties of objects when one sees them on direct virtue aistheology should count as genuine *seeing as*.<sup>35</sup> That is, although one does not attribute *F*-ness to what one sees when one exercises a competence to see *F* things, one is genuinely perspectivally sensitive to the *F*-ness of what one sees, in exactly the same way that one is when one has indexical thoughts. Since it is agreed that indexical thoughts rationalize beliefs about the self, here, and now, there is no good reason to think perception may not. Thus direct virtue aistheology can adequately capture the sense in which we see objects as having certain properties and how doing so may rationalize beliefs and actions regarding the object and its *F*-ness from the subject’s perspective, while providing a clear explanation of how it is nonconceptual.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>35</sup>I think this also provides us with the beginnings of an account of concept acquisition, although this is not the space to pursue this approach. Here I only point to the fact that our indexical thoughts have the kind of rationalizing roles where perspectival sensitivity to certain properties in thinking about an object rationalize attributing those properties to the object.

<sup>36</sup>It is worth noting that this general approach to how seeing and thinking play a rational role in one’s mental life fares much better than the approach that most people who argue that perceptual experience must be conceptual in order to rationalize beliefs. This argument typically depends on the assumption that the explanation of why one state rationalizes another is to be given solely in terms of their contents. But as mentioned above, this is implausible for the case of context-sensitive beliefs. The reason why one’s *here* beliefs rationalize one’s *there* beliefs has to do with the relations among the believings.

## 4 The Indiscriminability of Good and Bad Cases

The last problem I will discuss here is the relationship between *good* and *bad* cases of perceptual experience. Good and bad cases arise in any domain of performance, but perceptual perceptual experience is a little bit more complicated than most. This is because in the domain of perception we do not just have two options: perceiving things as they are and failing to perceive things at all (hallucinating). We can perceive things, but not as they are.

Cases of perceiving things as they are are cases in which one's competence to perceive is fully manifested. Cases of hallucination are cases in which one's competence to perceive is merely exercised, and so much goes wrong that one fails entirely to secure a target of the activity. Cases of illusion require more complex treatment.

In *good* cases, where one sees things as they are, one sees objects as having many properties. Importantly, not all of these properties are on a par with one another. E.g., one might see something as red and see something as crimson, but the facts that make it the case that one sees it as red depend on the facts that make it the case that one sees it as crimson.<sup>37</sup> The facts that make it the case the one sees an object as a dog might likewise depend on the facts that make it the case that it seems to have a certain shape. In general, some properties of a thing may make a difference to one's perceptual engagement with it but only in virtue of others of its properties making a difference to one's perceptual engagement with it.

There thus arises the possibility that the manifestation conditions for these more fundamental aspects of the competence might be in place even though the manifestation conditions for the other properties are not. In such a case, the target of the perceiving is secured, even though part of the competence is not manifested. These are cases of perceptual illusion.

Again I'll take visual experience as an example. Suppose that what seems to one to be a bird of prey is actually just a toy airplane in the distance. In this case, one has a perceptual illusion as of a bird of prey. One sees the airplane, but does not see it as it is. Still, one does see it as having some of the properties it does in fact have—it is a bounded, continuously moving object, and one sees it as such. This is enough to secure it as the

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<sup>37</sup>Note: the dependency of competences to see on other competences to see may or may not track the metaphysical dependence relations among the properties exploited by the competences.

target of an exercise of a perceptual competence and so one sees the thing, even though one sees it as a bird of prey when it is not. This is a case of a partially degenerate exercise of a competence to perceive, one in which enough of the manifestation conditions were in place to constitute seeing the object, but some of them failed.<sup>38</sup>

Contrast that kind of case with the following sort of case:

**Veridical Hallucination** Sandra's new puppy has been giving her a headache. She reaches for pain killers but her friend Zoe, knowing how trying it is to have a new puppy, decides to play a trick on her, replacing her pain killers with pills that make one hallucinate black and white dogs. Sandra takes a pill, which causes her to have a perceptual experience as of a black and white dog on the floor before her. In fact, there is a black and white dog on the floor before her (her puppy is black and white), but this fact plays no causal role in her perceptual experience.

This is a case of what some people call "veridical hallucinations"—Sandra has a perceptual experience that "matches" a real-world scenario, but she hallucinates it because it is not appropriately related to her environment. This is so despite the fact that Sandra's puppy caused her to have the perceptual experience in question (in virtue of causing her to reach for the pain killers), and even is causally related to her having an "accurate" perceptual experience, in the sense of rationalizing true beliefs (in virtue of causing Zoe to decide to replace Sandra's pills with pills that cause hallucinations of dogs that look like Sandra's puppy).

On direct virtue aistheology, what makes it the case that Sandra has a perceptual experience as of a black and white dog is that she exercises her competence to see black and white dogs. But because the manifestation conditions require a certain particular kind of causal relation between the dog and the operation of the basis of her competence (involving, e.g., the retina), and such conditions fail to obtain, she *merely* exercises her competence. She hallucinates.

Lastly, how does direct virtue aistheology explain the possibility of indiscernibility of cases of hallucination or illusion from cases of seeing things as they are?

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<sup>38</sup>binding problem

When a competence is degenerately exercised, the proficiency condition is still in place. According to direct virtue aistheology, it is the proficiency condition that determines what one sees an object as when a competence is manifested or degenerately exercised. The phenomenal character of seeing things as they are, illusions, and hallucinations is thus explained by facts about the competence of which they are exercises, which may be the same in all cases. (However, the *exercises* are importantly different in kind.)

There is no difference in what it is like for one when one sees *a* to be *F* and when one has an illusion as of *a*'s being *F*, because the same competence is exercised and the target is the same, but there is a difference in what it is like for one to see *a* to be *F* and to see *b* to be *F*, in virtue of one being a seeing of *a* and the other being a seeing of *b*. They rationalize different singular beliefs (that *a* is *F* and that *b* is *F*, respectively). That is, they make a difference to which beliefs it is rational for the subject to form, from her perspective, on the basis of her so perceiving, and so there is a difference in perspective in the two cases of perceiving. In contrast, there is no difference in what beliefs or actions one is rational in believing or doing on the basis of having an illusion as of *a*'s being *F* from one's seeing *a* to be *F*. (However, in one case one will acquire knowledge that *a* is *F* whereas in the other case one will not.)

The kind of difference in perspective between seeing *a* to be *F* and seeing *b* to be *F*, however, is not a difference that would allow one to discriminate *a* from *b*. Indeed, one's competence to see *F* things is a competence to see different things in different contexts (as opposed to, e.g., one's competence to see one's mother as such). It is a kind of competence one may manifest when one has no other means of engaging with the object. Ex hypothesi, there is no difference in how one sees the two objects *as*, because one exercises the same competence on two occasions, and so there is no way the perceptual experiences could provide one with a means of discriminating the objects from each other.<sup>39</sup>

But this difference in what it is like is not a difference that provides the

<sup>39</sup>The lioness' competence is of this sort. Her competence is one that may be manifested at different times with different animals as prey, but in any particular case her action is directed at a particular animal. It is features of the context that make it the case that a particular animal is her prey. The competence to think of a place as *here* is a competence of this sort. This kind of object-directedness can arise when the agent has no other means of engaging with the object.

perceiver with, or presupposes, a way of identifying or distinguishing targets of manifestations of the same competence at various times. The object makes a difference to what it is like for the subject in making it rational for her to form beliefs about it, but does not make a difference in the sort of way that would allow targets on various occasions of manifestation of the competence to be discriminated from one another. In a case where the competence is merely exercised, but not manifested, there is no target of the activity. But this need not be a fact that is available to the subject in virtue of her exercise of competence.

The account thus can explain the possibility of indiscernibility of hallucinations and illusions from cases of seeing things as they are without appeal to representation, and while respecting the idea that perception is genuinely object-involving.

## 5 Conclusion

When we see, we see things *as* being a certain way. Traditionally, the project of explaining what it is to see *as* has been broken down into two: first one explains what it is for an experience to represent a thing's being a certain way, and then one explains how that experience is related to a particular object so as to make it the case that the experience is *of* a particular object, and to thus represent *it* as having the properties represented by one's experience. I have shown an alternative of conceiving of the seeing relation and the facts in virtue of which it obtains that makes progress in three central problems in the philosophy of perception. I conclude that direct virtue aistheology, and more generally *seeing first* aistheology, deserves further study. In closing, I would like to consider a quote of Fred Dretske's:

Epistemology is concerned with knowledge: how do we manage to get things right? There is a deeper question: how do we manage to get things wrong?

—Dretske (1986)

One way of understanding what I have been arguing here is that philosophy of perception must be primarily concerned with the question of how we get things right, not how we get things wrong. Perceptual experience is a disjunctive kind, and cases of hallucination and illusion are deviations

from cases when we see things as they are. We have been too focused on the question of when we might legitimately call a state truth-evaluable to ask whether the phenomenon of interest was at heart a matter of truth-evaluability. I think that it is not, and that object-directedness is the central feature of perceptual directedness.

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