

Characterising Disjunctivism

Disjunctive accounts of experience are said to deny a common factor to perception and hallucination: some theorists frame this denial in terms of the denial of a common content, whilst others deny that perception and hallucination form a common kind of mental event. In this paper I explore whether these accounts are really distinct: a motivation for the common kind formulation is presented, but consideration of the notion of a common kind gives us reason to think that such a formulation will rely on the common content formulation. Further, proper attention to the way in which we group experiences allows the common content account to respect the motivations of the common kind theorist.

1. Introduction

There has been a resurgence of interest of late in the question of whether we should offer a disjunctive account of perceptual experience. According to Mike Martin, disjunctivism offers a way of safeguarding Naïve Realism about perceptual experience, the thesis that “the actual objects of perception, the external things such as trees, tables and rainbows, which one can perceive, and the properties which they can manifest to one when perceived, partly constitute one’s conscious experience, and hence determine the phenomenal character of one’s experience” [Martin 1997: p.83]. ‘Constitute’ here seems to mean something like ‘make the experience what it is’.¹ So, on this understanding of Naïve Realism, if the objects of perception are the mind-independent objects in the environment, then those objects make that experience *what it is*, such that an experience of that type would not be possible in the absence of the objects perceived.

The possibility of endorsing a naïve realist account of experience has historically been marginalised by application of the Argument from Illusion.² The possibility of an experience which is phenomenologically indistinguishable from veridical perception entails that our experience is of such a sort that we could be having an experience of the same sort in the absence of the objects

¹ Definition 7 in the OED: “To make (a thing) what it is; to give its being to, form, determine”

² A classic exposition is in Ayer [1940]. Mark Johnston has provided a recent version of the Argument. [Johnston 2003].

perceived. There is a common element to genuine perception and hallucination: what makes an experience a case of perception is external to the characterisation of the experience itself. To borrow John McDowell's phrase [1982: p.386], we can call such an account a Highest Common Factor (HCF) account of experience, because it holds that there is an element common to hallucination and perception.

The Argument from Illusion is meant to stand in the way of a naïve realist account of visual experience. For, if the Argument is correct, the mind-independent objects that we take ourselves to see cannot feature in our experience, since veridical perception is composed of two parts: a content which could be present in hallucination, and a second element "the extra bit that perception has over and above the appearance." [Dancy 1995, p.421]. More specifically, objects cannot be constitutive of experience and its phenomenal qualities, since experiences with the same content are possible in the absence of those objects. The HCF account makes the characterisation of whether an experience is a hallucination or a perception external to the characterisation of the experience as such, whereas for the naïve realist it is constitutive of this experience that it involves the perceptible objects in the world since the objects in the world determine the content of the experience.

It is here that disjunctive accounts of perceptual experience enter.³ The possibility of hallucinations conflicts with naïve realism only to the extent that it supports the HCF model, that is, only to the extent that we assume that even in the veridical case of perception, what we experience falls short of the objects perceived in such a way that they cannot be constitutive of the experience. "But suppose we say – not at all unnaturally – that an appearance that such-and-such is the case can be *either* a mere appearance *or* the fact that such-and-such is the case making itself perceptually manifest to someone." [McDowell 1982: pp.386-7]. Here is a disjunction about experiences: either an experience is a case of veridical perception or it is a case of hallucination. Such a formulation allows the naïve realist to hold onto the thought that in cases of veridical perception, the object perceived is constitutive of the experience, by

³ This way of setting up the motivation for disjunctivism comes from [McDowell 1982]

denying what the HCF account affirms: that there is a common element to perception and hallucination of the sort which is incompatible with mind-independent objects being constitutive of veridical perception.

If this way of setting up the problem is right, then formulating a disjunctive account of experience requires specifying the nature of the common element that the disjunctivist rejects: what is the common element that prevents one from affirming that naïve realist thesis that the objects perceived are constitutive of the experience? But a more limited question concerns me here: what *type* of common factor does one deny by rejecting an element common to perception and hallucination. On one line of thought, one denies a common factor to perception and hallucination by denying that there is a common content of experience: in the case of veridical perception the content of the experience is determined by the objects perceived in such a way that the same content is not available in the absence of the objects perceived. In contrast is an approach which denies a common factor by denying that there is a common basic kind of mental experience which includes perception and hallucination. On this view, perception and hallucination are more basic categories of mental experience than the more general category of experience. I will term these the Common Content and Common Kind approach respectively. My concern in this paper is to see whether these accounts are really distinct, and if so, which one should be preferred.⁴

2. The Content and Kind Approaches

The Content approach seems present in Snowdon's writings. Snowdon introduces the common factor model, which the disjunctivist will reject, as the thesis that "experiential occurrences... are, in respect of the experiential element in them, of the same fundamental sort." [Snowdon 2005: p.136]. This builds on a previous characterisation of disjunctivism as denying the "common

⁴ A note on the term 'content': 'content' can be a technical term, but no such specialist meaning is intended here. As I will use the term, the content of an experience is simply *what the experience is of*. This understanding of content is neutral on what the content of an experience is: possibilities include a mind-dependent image, a propositional or representational state, or the actual mind-independent objects in the environment. (Thus in talking of the content of an experience, we are not committed to the idea that having content involves the presence of a representational state: though it does leave such a possibility open.)

visual element thesis” [Snowdon 2002: p.225]. What does Snowdon mean by “experiential element”? The experiential element of an experience seems to be the thing which makes it an experience of that sort; i.e., the content of the experience. Consider his interpretation of Hinton: “The thesis, that all such experiences, both perceptual and non-perceptual, have the same nature and, therefore, do not reach out to, or involve as constituents, items external to the subject, is what I take Hinton to have meant (at least in connection to visual experience) by talk of a ‘common visual element’...” [Snowdon 2005: p.136]. The reference to the nature of perceptual experience suggests that Snowdon is thinking here of how we characterise the content of that experience: whether that content is constituted by the objects perceived or is independent of those objects. Similarly when John Campbell characterises disjunctivism as the thesis that “when you see an object, the object itself is a constituent of your experience” [Campbell 2002a: p.134], it seems that he supposes disjunctivism to be a thesis about the content of the experience.

In contrast is the Common Kind approach, most prevalent in Mike Martin’s writings but perceptible in the Child passage quoted above, which focuses on whether perception and hallucination form a common basic kind of mental experience. For Martin, a defence of Naïve Realism requires a rejection of the thesis that “whatever kind of mental event occurs when one is veridically perceiving some scene... that kind of event can occur whether or not one is perceiving” [Martin 2003: p.40]. And elsewhere he writes that the disjunctivist’s first claim is that “no instance of the *specific kind of experience* I have now... could occur were one not to be perceiving such a mind-independent object as this.” [Martin n.d.: p.4].

Are these really two distinct approaches? One reason for thinking that they are not is that a natural way of sorting experiences is according to their content. So if you think that the content of a perceptual experience involves as its constituents the actual objects perceived then you are committed to the thought that, at least on one way of classifying them, perceptual experiences and hallucinatory experiences are of fundamentally different kinds. (Note that

Snowdon in the quote above talks about experiences being “of the same fundamental sort”, which suggests typing experiences by their content.)

But although many disjunctivists would accept this claim, one could deny it. As Martin has pointed out [Martin 2002], it does not follow from the fact that the content of an experience depends on the object perceived that an experience of that kind could not have taken place in the absence of those objects. In particular, one can reject the claim about typing experiences if you think that the truth-evaluable content of an experience is dependent on the objects perceived, but that such content is not essential to the experience being the kind of experience that it is. So if one accepts the possibility of denying the claim that we should type experiences by their content, then the denial of a common kind of event will be wider than the mere denial of a common content, since one can accept that the content is different without accepting that one should type experiences according to their content.

I will not go into the details of such a position here, but we can motivate the denial of the typing claim by considering the experience of identical twins. Consider two experiences of identical rubber ducks coming off a production line [Martin 2002: pp.179-80]. If the content of an experience depends on the objects perceived, then my experience of Huey will be different from my experience of Dewey, despite the fact that both ducks are presented to me in exactly the same manner, since the content of the first experience involves Huey whilst the content of the second involves Dewey. And if we type experiences by their content, then we are forced to conclude that each experience is of a fundamentally different kind.

But, asks Martin, is this really forced on us, just from the fact that the content of each experience depends on the particular duck? One might think that “it is plausible to suppose that episodes of thinking which concern different objects, but similarly presented, should be counted together. If this is right, then we see the need to make room for truth conditions of thought episodes which are tied to the objects the thoughts about, yet for which we do not get object-involving mental states or episodes”, that is kinds of states or episodes which could only

exist given the existence of the object perceived. [Martin 2002: p.178]. The experiences of Huey and Dewey have different contents, but we are supposed to find it plausible that they should be counted as being of the same kind.

So if there is room for an opponent of disjunctivism to accept that aspects of the content of an experience depend on the objects perceived, but to deny that we should type experiences by their content, then only a denial of a common kind of mental state will have any bite. But this will only be possible if the Common Kind and Common Content approaches are really distinct. Let me trail what follows: I believe that clarification of the Common Kind formulation shows it to rely on something like the Common Content formulation. More specifically, we need to clarify exactly what it means to say that two events are of a common basic kind: it will turn out that an answer to this question can only be given sense by invoking the notion of a common content. We can explore this by considering Martin's version of the Common Kind account.

3. Common Content vs. Common Kind

Disjunctivism rejects a factor common to perception and hallucination. The Common Kind formulation understands this to involve the rejection of a kind of event common to perception and hallucination, so that an experience of the kind one has when veridically perceiving is not possible in the absence of the objects perceived. The first question to ask is, what does it mean for two experiences to form a common kind? One might think, not unnaturally, that experiences fall under different kinds: veridical visual experiences form a kind, as do hallucinations, but so do experiences themselves. It is because of this that such the Common Kind theorist needs to bring in the idea of a basic kind. Child writes, "on this [the HCF] view, the concept of an experience is basic, and we make sense of vision and hallucination by extension from this basic unit" [Child 1994: p.144]. The disjunctivist rejects this order of explanation, and thus claims that perceptions form a basic kind, and that the kind 'experiences' is derivative of this more basic kind. As Martin puts it, "for it to be a substantive matter that perceptions fails to be the same kind of mental episode as illusions or

hallucinations, we need some characterisation of events which reflect their nature or what is fundamentally true of them” [Martin n.d.: p.7].

The Common Kind approach requires there to be a privileged classification of individuals which determines the most basic kind individuals fall under. One worry with this approach is that it seems that events and states can fall under many different kinds, and which kind we pick is dependent on the use we want the description to have. Ninety minutes of football can be described as a match, a derby or an FA cup quarter-final: nothing seems to hang on which description we choose, and similarly nothing seems to hang on which kind we see the event as falling under. The scepticism expressed here is a scepticism about the notion of a basic kind; the case of the football match is meant to suggest that there is no clear way of privileging one description of an event as more basic than another.

The Common Kind theorist, then, needs an account of how we are to distinguish the most fundamental kind an event falls under. How should we determine which description of an event “tells us what essentially the event or episode is.” [Martin n.d.: p.8]? Let us clarify the notion of a basic kind. What is a basic kind of event? One answer is provided by Martin: “I will assume that for mental episodes or states there is a unique answer to this question [the question ‘What is it?'] which gives its most specific kind.” [Martin n.d.: p.8]. So the answer to the question ‘what is it?’, when asked of an event, gives the most basic kind the event falls under.

Martin does not elaborate on such a proposal, but the idea is interesting and worth pursuing. For it to be plausible that perceptions are of a more specific kind than experiences in general, there must be a useful notion of a basic kind which can inform us about the essential features of an event. Can the notion of a basic kind help the Common Kind approach in characterising disjunctivism in terms of the most basic kinds of mental events that perceptions and hallucinations fall under? In what follows I will explore this idea, before concluding that to the extent that such an approach can characterise

disjunctivism it must rely on the insights expressed in the Common Content approach.

4. A Basic Kind

On this formulation of disjunctivism, what we are interested in is whether visual perception forms a basic kind, or whether experience – thought of as neutral between vision and hallucination – is a basic kind of mental event. What is it for something to be a member of a basic kind? Martin explicates this notion by appeal to the question “What is it?”: the most fundamental and basic answer to that question determines the most basic kind an individual falls under.

One sceptical response could question whether there is always an answer to the question “What is it?”, or at least, whether there was always an answer which usefully picked out a basic kind of event. Consider again the 90 minutes of football; the answers ‘a football match’, ‘a derby’, or ‘an FA Cup quarter-final’ all seem appropriate answers to the question ‘What is it?’, and perhaps none of these is any more basic than the others. I want to put aside such sceptical worries, and allow Martin the claim that there is always an answer to the question, for the line of argument I am going to pursue will suggest that even allowing Martin even with such a notion, the Common Kind account relies on thoughts about the content of experience as enunciated by the Common Content formulation.

Remember that the question as to whether perceptions and hallucinations form a common kind of event is meant to explicate the notion of perceptual experiences, as opposed to hallucinations, being constituted in part by the objects perceived. In which case, there has to be something about the fact that objects constitute perceptual experiences which determines that they form a more basic kind than experiences in general, hence Martin’s focus on whether perceptions and hallucinations form a common kind of mental event.

One way we can explore this idea is through the concept of a natural kind. The concept of a natural kind is quite unclear, but let us take Putnam’s original

characterisation as a starting point: natural kinds are “classes whose normal distinguishing characteristics are ‘held together’ or even explained by deep-lying mechanisms” [Putnam 1970: p.139]. There are a number of ways in which this central claim can be explained, but here is one route. Let us focus on the sameness relation which determines whether two individuals count as members of the same natural kind. For example, Putnam’s original characterisation of the sameness relation for water was as follows: “x bears the relation same_L to y just in case 1. x and y are both liquids, and 2. x and y agree in important physical properties” [1975a: pp.238-9]. Putting to one side the liquid condition, we have the stricture that x and y must agree in important physical properties: which are the physical properties that determine the sameness relation?

There have been numerous attempts to spell out this sameness relation. One prominent interpretation has held that the sameness relation relevant for whether two natural things count as members of a natural kind is sameness of internal structure, but it is notoriously difficult to formulate such an account with rigour. In particular, understanding the sameness relation as picking out sameness of (scientifically-discoverable) internal structure raises the question about which feature of internal structure is relevant, for example, whether differences at the level of isotopes suffice to determine the sameness relation or whether we should only focus at the atomic level.⁵ More pertinently, if the claim that natural kinds are determined by their internal structure is an empirical claim about how we use natural kind words⁶, then there seems to be no fixed level of internal structure which determines whether we class two things as a member of a natural kind or not: at times, differences at the isotope level will be important, and at times it will not. We seem to have no principled way of determining which features of the scientifically determinable internal structure suffice to set the sameness relation.

Instead we should not focus on the internal structure of the natural thing *simpliciter*, but instead on how that internal structure affects the causal powers of the natural thing, and thus our theories about how that natural thing functions

⁵ See the discussion of the different isotopes of chlorine in [Mellor 1977]

⁶ See [Child 2001: p.44-5]. That the thesis is an empirical thesis about how we use natural kind words provides an answer to the criticism in Cassam [1986] that in focusing on the scientific structure of natural things we are “guilty of a certain cultural... parochialism” [p.97].

in the world. Consider this passage from Wiggins: “x is an f (horse, cypress-tree, orange, caddis-fly...) if and only if given good exemplars of the kind that is in question, *the best theoretical description that emerged from collective inquiries* into the kind would group x alongside those exemplars” [1980: p.78, my emphasis] That is, a natural thing is a member of a natural kind if it fits into an explanatory and theoretical description of the kind. As Platts puts it, “the ‘important physical properties’ spoken of by Putnam are those important for explanatory purposes” [1983: p.134].

In classifying something as a member of a natural kind, that is as a member of a most basic kind, we are assuming that that the important physical properties that make it a member of that natural kind, the properties that characterise the sameness relation, are properties that will feature in an explanatory theory. Natural kind classifications are “explanatory promissory notes to be met, if at all, by empirical investigation of the natural world” [Platts 1983: p.135], though this is of course compatible with the thought that nature might not match up to our initial classifications.⁷ So the concept of a natural kind is the concept of a kind the membership of which is determined by those physical properties that will feature in explanatory theories concerning that kind

The sameness relation that we intend when we designate something as belonging to a natural kind may often be characterised in terms of internal structure, since often the internal scientifically discoverable structure will feature in explanatory theories, but there is no reason why the theoretical description should not make use of macro-physical properties. (Wiggins cites *gene-pool* as a useful theoretic notion which makes reference to both microphysical and macro-physical properties. [2001: p.80]). Nor need the users of the natural kind term know the explanatory theory in question.⁸ All that matters is that determining whether something is a member of a natural kind is a matter of determining whether there are lawlike explanatory principles which would group the item with good exemplars of the kind.

⁷ Wiggins cautions in a footnote: “Witness what befell ‘caloric’, ‘phlogiston’ and Leuwenhoek’s ‘hominids’.” [2001: p.80, fn.3]

⁸ See Putnam on his “socio-linguistic hypothesis” about the division of linguistic labour; [Putnam 1975a: pp.227-9]

This is an important thought, and very helpful in structuring the debate about natural kinds.⁹ It makes clear that when we classify things as belonging to natural kinds we are aiming not simply to reflect the internal structure of the objects, but to capture the causal structure of the world, and to the extent that this causal structure is a function of the internal structure of the objects in the world, our groupings will be based upon that internal structure. The relevant way of spelling out the sameness relation is, then, sameness in respect of causal explanatory properties. But, more importantly, we can use this account in considering how we should decide which experiences count as a basic kind. (I have not used the terminology of 'natural kind' when talking about mental states or events, because it seems to me that our talk about natural kinds is talk about the physical properties of natural things, concrete individuals in the world. Nothing seems to me to be gained by widening the concept to include mental states or events under that concept.) The thought is that what determines whether a natural thing is a member of a natural kind is whether the best explanatory theories about how the world works would group that natural thing alongside the best exemplars of that kind. The explanatory theories are about how members of the kind behave in the world: how they react when put in certain situations, how they interact with other natural things etc.

In the case of experiences the thought might go like this: in examining whether visual experiences form a basic kind, what we are interested in is whether the best causal explanatory theories about the world would have to mention the properties of visual experiences specifically, or more widely, mere experiences. What sort of theories are we concerned with? In the case of natural things, the explanatory theories are explanations of why certain things happen, why natural things behave in certain ways when put in certain situations. Law-like regularities are observed concerning the behaviour of the natural things in certain situations, and the reactions that they cause. We then build up a theory which posits the presence of the natural thing as a condition of the effects, such

⁹ For example, it opens up the possibility that individuals can fall under different natural kinds at different levels, through featuring in different explanatory theories at different levels of explanation. Thus, in the case of the differing isotopes mentioned above, a natural thing could count as a member of a natural kind at one level in virtue of its atomic structure, and as a member of a different kind at a lower level in virtue of its being a particular isotope. At the various levels the greater explanatory power of the explanation goes hand-in-hand with a narrowing of the range of natural things that fall under the law based explanation.

that we should group together all natural things which share those causally explanatory properties. In the case of experiences, our concern then should be with the causally explanatory theories which explain certain events in terms of the presence of that experience. Since our concern is with perception and hallucination, it is natural to start with the explanation of the behaviour of subjects. What are the explanatory theories we have which relate the behaviour of subjects to the presence of certain experiences? More specifically, what we might be concerned with is whether the best explanatory theories which relate subjects to the physical world have to mention visual events specifically, or simply mere experiences, neutral between veridical perceptions and hallucinations.

To recap, the suggestion we are investigating is that the best way to characterise the disjunctivist's claim that, in cases of veridical perception, the objects perceived are constitutive of the experience, is as a claim about whether visual perceptions are events of a more basic kind than experiences in general. And, I am suggesting, support for this claim requires a defence of the idea that causal explanatory statements about subjects and their interaction with the world will have to make reference to the fact that a subject is perceiving, and not just that she is having an experience of such and such a sort. What form will such theories take? The most basic explanatory theories we have about subjects and the world concerns the behaviour of subjects and the reasons for that behaviour. So if we were interested in the role of experiences in explanatory theories about subjects, one way to look at this would be to see whether theories about the behaviour of subjects must use the properties of mere experiences or visual perceptions construed narrowly. That is, the question is whether when forming explanatory theories of the form "S a-d because of p", 'p' will have to mention perceptual events specifically, or mere experiences in general.

5. Common Kind and Causal Explanation

This is an interesting question, and an important one for the disjunctivist to engage with, since a common reaction is to think that explanations about the

causal powers of mental events need only make reference to how things seem to the subject, that is to a state which is neutral as to whether things actually are as the subject takes them to be. I will examine the source of this intuitive resistance below. But first note that, if this common reaction were correct, then experiences, defined as neutral between vision and hallucination, would form a basic kind of event, and Martin's attempt to characterise disjunctivism with reference to whether perceptions and hallucinations form a common kind would not only be misguided, but damaging to the disjunctivist project, since it would not only fail to characterise the disjunctivist position, it would also provide support for the HCF account of experience. A defence of the Common Kind approach cannot avoid a defence of the claim that explanatory theories about subjects and their behaviour must involve reference to perceptual events and not merely to experiences.

I said that such a view can encounter enormous intuitive resistance: the possibility of illusion causing someone to act in a similar way to veridical perception is often taken to illustrate the absurdity of claiming that causally explanatory theories must make use of the concept of perception and not just experience. Here are two prominent forms such intuitive resistance can take. The first is phenomenological: from the subject's point of view, a hallucination is indistinguishable from a case of veridical perception, thus the behaviour that it causes must be the same. For if things seem the same to the subject, how could there be any difference in how the experience caused her to react? The second line of thought is causal: hallucinations and perceptions have the same proximate causal conditions. The causal properties of a mental event supervene on these local conditions, and thus perceptions and hallucinations must have the same causal powers. Fodor refers to this as a metaphysical principle: "Causal powers supervene on local micro-structure. In the psychological case, they supervene on local neural structure. We abandon this principle at our peril; mind/ brain supervenience (/identity) is our only plausible account of how mental states could have the causal powers that they do have." [Fodor 1987: p.44]

Arguments of this form are familiar from the debate about narrow and broad content: roughly, the debate about whether the content of beliefs could be environment-involving in ways familiar from Twin Earth examples.¹⁰ The Fodorian challenge is to explain how the behaviour of the protagonists across Twin Earth examples can be identical without using some notion of narrow content which supervenes on local facts about the subject. But note that for our purposes here this debate is tangential. For the claim that the Common Kind disjunctivist has to defend is that the best explanatory theories linking experiences to behaviour will have to use the notion of a perceptual event, and not simply experiences, understood as being neutral between perception and hallucination. That is, we are interested in whether perceptual events are causally explanatory – and there is no reason to suppose that the higher level properties of an event are irrelevant to the pattern of causal explanation.

This is Putnam's point about square pegs and round holes, as Campbell recalls: "Hilary Putnam remarked long ago [Putnam 1975c: pp.295-6] that when we explain the inability of a square peg to get through a round hole by appealing to the rigidity of the materials used and the fact that the cross-section of the peg is greater than the diameter of the hole, this explanation is complete as it stands; it is not merely a promissory note to be redeemed by an excursion into microphysics." [Campbell 2002b: p.140-1]. Similarly, the attempt to provide a causal explanation which uses the notion of perceptual experience and not merely experiences in general, will not flounder if *causal* powers supervene on local micro-structure, as long as the properties of perceptual experience are genuinely better causally explanatory than the properties of mere experiences.

As P.F. Strawson explains it, causal explanation relies on the fact that we, as human beings, find certain patterns of explanation more natural than others, that certain facts become comprehensible in the light of others. Causal explanation is an "intellectual or rational or intensional relation... It holds between facts or truths." [Strawson 1985: p.115]. For our purposes here, the question of whether the best explanatory theories must make use of the concept of perception or only mere experience is a question about whether it is

¹⁰ See [Putnam 1975a] and [Burge 1979].

the properties of specifically perceptual events which are causally explanatorily relevant, or whether it is those properties of experiences in general, properties which are common to perceptions and hallucinations.

So in order to defend the claim that visual perceptions form a basic kind, the Common Kind disjunctivist of Martin's persuasion must defend the claim that it is the features of perceptions which are causally explanatorily relevant. A model of how to provide such a defence is present in the second chapter of Timothy Williamson's *Knowledge and Its Limits* [Williamson 2000]. As part of his defence of the claim that knowing is a mental state, Williamson argues that knowing plays a role in the causal explanation of actions, and that often actions are better explained by citing what the subject knows and not just what she believes. Here is his example of a burglar ransacking a house:

'A burglar spends all night ransacking a house risking discovery by staying so long. We ask what features of the situation when he entered the house led to that result. A reasonable answer is that he knew that there was a diamond in the house. To say just that he believed truly that there was a diamond in the house would be to give a worse explanation, one whose explanans and explanandum are less closely connected.' [Williamson 2000: p.62]

The claim is that the burglar *knowing* that there was a diamond in the house explains his actions better than any explanation that refers only to the burglar's beliefs, or even his true beliefs. Why is this? Partly it is that since knowing is factive, his knowing that there is a diamond in the house entails that there was a diamond there. But it is also because his knowing there is a diamond makes him more likely to stay there than if he merely believed, or believed truly. 'Although knowing is not invulnerable to destruction by later belief, its nature is to be robust in that respect' [Williamson 2000: p.63].

Williamson's claim is that believing and believing truly cannot suffice to explain the behaviour of the burglar because their use results in explanatory loss. But it can be hard to see why there should be a difference here. Surely a true belief explains just as much as the burglar's knowledge? It is important to note that Williamson does not claim that believing that there is a diamond in the house doesn't provide *any* explanation of the burglar's actions, only that his knowing provides a *better* explanation than his merely believing it (truly). And, as

Williamson puts it, “the substitution of ‘believe truly’ for ‘know’ weakens the explanation by lowering the probability of the explanandum conditional on the explanans.” [2000: p.62].

Still, one might feel, in this particular case surely there can be no difference between believing truly and knowing, since the true belief simply constitutes the knowledge in question, so the effects must be the same. But that is to ignore the fact that Williamson is interested in explaining the causal efficacy of a general state (see [Williamson 2000: pp.62-63]). “No doubt the particular circumstances that in some sense realize the state in a given case can be described in many different ways; what matters is how relevant those descriptions are to an understanding of the effect in question.” [Williamson 2000: p.63])

Consider the concept of ‘belief-that-will-survive-scrutiny’. If it is key to Williamson’s argument is that knowing is robust to potential counter-evidence, and so in a way that is different to mere stubbornness or irrational insensitivity to counter-evidence, will it not be enough to raise the adequacy of the explanation to say that the burglar had a true belief-that-will-survive-scrutiny¹¹? It is possible that in any particular case some such gerrymandered concept could play the same explanatory role, but the question is whether substituting such a concept could provide the same explanatory power in all cases where we normally cite a person’s knowledge as an explanation of their action. It seems plausible that no such concept will be able to account for the myriad of ways in which we cite a person’s knowledge in a causal explanation. If this is so, then knowing plays a causal explanatory role which cannot be captured by factoring knowledge into an internal belief-like factor and the external constraint that the belief-like state be true.

It seems that similar defence can be made in the case of visual perception, making use of the factive nature of perceiving. If we are trying to explain why I picked up a glass of water, the fact that I perceived it will be a better explanation than the fact that I merely experienced it, because the former, unlike the latter,

¹¹ See [Magnus and Cohen: 2003] for a suggestion along these lines.

entails that there was a glass there and therefore substantially raises the probability of the explanandum conditional on the explanans. So a general defence of the claim that mental events such as perceiving need to feature in explanatory theories might proceed as follows. First we have to establish the nature of the explanatory theories in question. These will be theories about the explanation of subjects' behaviour and their interaction with the physical world. What kind of form will these explanations take? They will normally take the form of "S A-ed because S E-ed that p", linking the perceptual experiences of subjects with their actions in a form which both rationalises the action and causally explains why the subject performed the action.¹² To support the claim that such explanatory theories must involve reference to the subject perceiving and not simply experiencing, the defender must show that substituting experiences for perceptions in such theories results in a lack of explanatory power.

Can this claim be made good? I believe so. Note first that the actions which need explaining will be environment-involving – they will not be explanations of the fact that a subject moves her hand in particular way, but explanations of the fact that she picked up a glass. Why would explanations of bodily movements not suffice? Because in forming explanations of a subject's interaction with her environment we are interested in explaining her actions, and actions are very different from bodily movements. As Child says, one difference is that, "as agents, we think about and understand our own behaviour in environment-involving ways: what I want to do when I want to sign a cheque is write my signature; I have no detailed beliefs about the sorts of bodily movements that will be involved in doing so." [1994: p.209]. As Yablo puts it, "what normally and primarily drives behaviour is outwardly directed attitudes, not how those attitudes happen to be encoded in people's heads." [Yablo 1997: p.272]. And if our explanatory theories are concerned with how experience *as conceived of from the personal point of view* can be causally explanatory, then our conceiving of ourselves as agents means that the explananda we are interested in are actions.

¹² This is the form of action explanation set out by Davidson in his [1963], with 'x' replaced with the more specific 'S E-ed that p'. Of course, along with the experience that p, there will also normally be a desire of the subject to undertake the action, but I take that for granted in what follows.

So what reason is there to think that perceptions will provide a better causal explanation of an agent's actions than mere experiences? Consider the action of picking up a glass – as mentioned above, the factivity of perceptual experiences raises the probability of the action conditional on the perception. But is the explanation that she picked up a glass because she saw it any better than the explanation that she picked up a glass because she had the experience of a glass *and there was a glass there*. (This is the equivalent step of replacing 'knows' with 'believes truly' in the burglar case.) Is the explanation which cites an agent's perceptions any better than one which cites her veridical experiences?

As in the case of knowledge, our interest is with the general state of perception, and there would seem to be cases where 'experiences veridically' will not serve the same role as 'perceives'. Consider a case introduced by Grice in his discussion of the causal theory of perception:

“...it might be that it looked to me as if there were a certain sort of pillar in a certain direction at a certain distance, and there might actually be such a pillar in that place; but if, unknown to me, there were a mirror interposed between me and the pillar, which reflected a numerically different though similar pillar, it would certainly be incorrect to say that I saw the first pillar, and correct to say that I saw the second.” [Grice 1961: pp.69-70]

In this case, the subject experiences a pillar and there is a pillar which is there, but that won't explain his action of, say, walking round the pillar, since in this case as soon as he tries to do so, he will quickly realise that there is a mirror in his way. That Grice saw a pillar is a better explanation of his walking round it than his merely experiencing a pillar veridically.

The mention of Grice might lead one to think that a simple causal condition will suffice here. Does replacement of 'perceives' with 'experiences veridically a glass which caused her experience' result in a loss of explanatory power? While the addition of the causal condition will deal with cases like the above, it risks running into the problem of deviant causal chains. A mere experience which is caused by the glass will lack the explanatory power of the perception of a glass in those cases where the glass does cause the experience but in some non-

standard way which would be picked up by the actions of the subject. And it seems that similar considerations could be adduced about any attempt to replace perceptions with a mere-experience type concept.

Let us return to our main discussion. Our focus has been on the disjunctivist claim that in cases of veridical perception, the objects perceived are constitutive of the experience such that an experience of that type is not possible in the absence of the object perceived. Our concern has been with whether this claim is best captured by denial that perception and hallucination are a common kind of mental event. And my suggestion so far has been that such a proposal will have to invoke something like the classification of kinds of mental events on the basis of their causal powers – which will, in turn, involve a defence of the claim that it is the features of perceptions specifically which will feature in causal explanations. I have not provided a full defence of that thesis, but the thoughts above have made it plausible that explanatory theories about a subject's actions will make reference to the properties of visual perceptions specifically and not just experiences in general.

6. Causal Explanation and Common Content

But we can push this line of thought further. The alternative to the Common Kind formulation was the Common Content formulation, which understood the claim that the objects perceived are constitutive of an experience as a claim about the content of the experience. On that view, to say that the objects perceived are constitutive of an experience is to say that the content of the experience cannot be characterised without reference to the objects perceived: the objects enter quite literally into the content of the experience. Yet, if we ask why explanatory theories linking experiences and actions would have to make use of the notion of a perceptual event and not just the concept of an experience, the natural answer from the above discussion seems to be this: it is the fact that a perception is about the objects perceived in the environment which permits it to be causally explanatorily relevant in a way that mere experience is not. That is, perceptions are causally explanatory in a way that

experiences are not precisely because we cannot characterise the content of that experience without reference to the objects in the environment.

This suggests that the Common Kind formulation will rely to some extent on the Common Content formulation. To the extent that the Common Kind formulation must focus on the causally explanatory power of perceiving as opposed to mere experiencing, it must focus on the fact that objects in the environment enter constitutively into the content of the experience, since that is what explains the greater causal explanatory power of perceptions. This is not to say that the Common Kind formulation is wrong or inappropriate, but simply to suggest that we lose nothing if we phrase the rest of this debate in terms of whether the content of our experience must be characterised with reference to the objects perceived, since it is this that determines whether perceptual states form a more basic kind of unit than the more general category of experience.

With this in mind, it is interesting to return to the case of identical but distinct individuals – the ducks on the factory line – which motivated a distinction between the Common Kind and Common Content approaches in the first place. The thought there was that experiences of numerically distinct but phenomenologically similar objects should be classes as members of the same kind, even though the content of the experiences differed. Using the model of natural kinds allows us to respect this distinction: the explanatory theories which explain a subject's actions with regard to identical rubber ducks will class her perceptions of those ducks as being of the same kind, even if they have different contents, since the perceptions with different contents will cause her to act in the same way. So there is no reason why the Common Content approach, combined with a plausible story about how the role of causal powers in determining kinds, cannot accept that the experiences with different contents are not, at base, experiences of the same kind.

But this does not mean that we have to amend the Common Content approach. Because it is still true that the reason why an explanatory theory will have to mention the properties of perceptions as opposed to mere experiences is that the content of the perception makes reference to the actual objects perceived in

the environment – even if the explanatory theory then goes on to group two experiences with different content as members of the same kind in virtue of falling under the same range of lawlike explanations. So by focusing on whether the content of an experience can be specified without reference to the actual objects perceived in the environment, we have a way of assessing the debate between the disjunctive and HCF models of experience.

My concern here has been with characterising a disjunctivist account of experience. The suggestion has been that the disjunctivist rejects a highest common factor of experience by upholding a particular claim about the content of experience, namely that in cases of veridical perception, the content of the experience cannot be characterised without reference to the objects perceived. This allows the disjunctivist to maintain that the objects perceived are constitutive of the experience. And combined with a plausible story of how it is that we type experiences, this claim about content also allows us to see why visual perceptual experiences should be thought of as a basic common kind of event, and not be subsumed under the more general kind of visual experiences.

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