

The Rise and Fall of Disjunctivism*

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Abstract

In the direct realist tradition of Reid and Austin, disjunctivism has joined its precursors in proudly trumpeting its allegiance with naïve realism. And the theory gains plausibility, particularly as compared with adverbialism, if one considers a Wittgensteinian line of argument regarding the use of sensation words. But ‘no common factor’ doctrines can be shown to be inconsistent with the naïve realism that has served as their main support. This does not mean that either disjunctivism or the Wittgensteinian perspective on language acquisition that informed it must be false. It does indicate, however, that linguistic arguments against private or internal meanings do not imply perceptual directness and that the espousal of direct realism—naïve or not—does not require adherence to disjunctivism.

Disjunctivism¹ is often associated with the proposition that for a subject *S* to have (or ‘enjoy’) a perceptual experience intensionally involving (or ‘as of’) some external object *O*, *S* must either actually perceive *O* or be in a condition in which it is ‘merely to *S*’ as if he were perceiving *O*, with the ‘merely’ indicating that both disjuncts cannot be true.² Of course, it is hard to imagine a philosopher of any description denying that someone who thinks he is seeing or hearing something is either really doing so or merely seems to be doing so, but is never (barring some Gettier-inspired scenario) both. As the point of the ‘merely’ is to require that the disjuncts are mutually exclusive, the entire assertion is nearly vacuous—a proposition that could be agreed to by the (hostile) sense-data theorist and the (sympathetic) direct realist alike. What *is* of consequence about the disjunctivist position is the claim that there need be no epistemically relevant³ ‘common factors’ shared by both the veridical and merely ostensible perceptual experiences described by those disjuncts, that, e. g., there is no *X* such that *X* must be apprehended both by those who are hearing bells and those only seeming to do so (McDowell, 1982, 2002; Martin, 2009a; Dancy, 2009).

A variety of virtues, both epistemic and metaphysical, have been claimed for disjunctivism (Soteriou, 2010), among the most important being its alleged consonance with common sense and ordinary language. The view has been thought to allow philosophers and psychologists to join with plumbers, ballerinas, and civil engineers in entirely dispensing with sense-data,

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¹The position was pioneered by J.M. Hinton (1967: 217–27) and developed in Hinton, 1973. It was subsequently popularized by Paul Snowdon and John McDowell among others. For a diverse collection of works on the subject, see Byrne and Logue, 2009. See also Putnam, 1999.

²As will be seen as we continue, in spite of my use of ‘intensionally,’ I want ‘seems’ and ‘perceive’ to be taken in a quite broad sense. If there are entirely non-cognitive forms of perception (say that of infants or animals), disjunctivism, as I understand the position, is to apply to all of them. It is not similarity of belief, however tepid or fervent, that is important here, but similarity of what might be called (if it did not beg any questions) ‘perceptual state.’

³Just what is meant by ‘epistemically relevant’ will be clarified as we continue. For the present, the main thing to understand is that the existence of an entirely causal commonality is not sufficient to produce epistemic relevancy.

where these are alleged to be entities that are (i) distinct from all physical items external to the perceiver (and from all surfaces of such items, if surfaces are not themselves considered physical); and (ii) such that the perception or other apprehension of them is indispensable to the perception of physical objects.⁴ Thus, disjunctivism is in the tradition not only of Thomas Reid's 18th Century critique of the Locke/Berkeley/Hume 'way of ideas' and the early 20th Century 'multiple relations critique of sense-data (Moore, 1917, Dawes Hicks, 1917), but is also aligned with the later adverbial theory⁵ Like the contemporary disjunctivist, these earlier realists were anxious to deny that when someone mistakes a blue door for a green one, there must be something (not necessarily mental, but certainly not the door) which is actually green. Reid and these later deniers of sense-data argued that any strictly philosophical inference⁶ from an item's looking green to somebody to the existence of a (perhaps different) item that must really *be* green, is fallacious.⁷ Partly because of this heritage, disjunctivism is commonly seen as akin to naïve realism: they both attempt to show that direct (i.e., with no epistemic intermediaries) access to garden variety physical objects can be consistent with the occasional manifestation of confounding perceptual simulacra. In fact, claims have been made by disjunctivists that *all* forms of direct realism (including naïve versions) entail the non-existence of any common factors to veridical and illusory perceptual situations (Martin, 2009a; Sturgeon, 2006). I hope to show in this paper, however, that, in spite of their shared antipathy to sense-data theories, disjunctivism and naïve realism are actually incompatible. This inconsistency results from the latter theory's acceptance of exactly the sort of common factor that disjunctivism denies can ever occur.

As I shall be assigning various views to the 'naïve realism' genus throughout this paper, it will be helpful to specify more precisely what I mean by that term:

Naïve Realism = df. A theory of perception according to which the vast majority of our every-day perceptual judgments are correct because, on its view, physical objects external to and independent of perceivers generally have the perceptual properties (colors, feels, shapes, etc.) that they are perceived to have (although they may have many others as well).⁸

⁴Sense-data are also regularly claimed to be items with which we have 'direct acquaintance,' a relationship which is said to allow some of our beliefs to be absolutely certain or incorrigible. This characteristic is not obviously required for the interposition of sense-data in perception of physical objects to make all such perceptual experience indirect or representative, however, so the concept of 'acquaintance' will not be discussed in this paper.

⁵For accounts of adverbialism, see, generally, the works of C.J. Ducasse and Roderick Chisholm on perception. Perhaps the most comprehensive statement of the position may be found in Chisholm, 1957.

⁶Obviously, inferences can sometimes be made from non-green doors to, e.g., green light or green lenses, but not without additional empirical information, perhaps involving the scientific principles of optics. I take such inferences not to be strictly philosophical. A recent discussion of Reid's philosophy of perception and his manner of dealing with perceptual illusions may be found in Horn, 2010.

⁷These philosophers, such as Moore (1917: 245–52), sometimes added the claim that 'looks statements' are unanalyzable.

⁸A similar account was recently provided by Charles Travis and was attributed by him to Putnam as well. According to Travis, NR is, 'roughly, just the view that perception is awareness of one's surroundings; so that the objects of perception are, at least typically, what does in fact surround us – notably, objects, such as pigs and Marmite, and facts of things being ways they are, such as that pig's staring at one through the railings of its sty' (Travis 2005: 53). See also Devitt 1996. I don't wish to claim that there are no competing definitions of naïve realism about, only that mine is a traditional even orthodox definition that lacks the obvious defects of some modern competitors. For example, Snowdon (2005: 138) allows a naïve realist to consistently hold that he and everyone else is and has always been dreaming, since his definition doesn't require that any perception has ever been (to use his term) 'genuine.' Another theorist requires naïve realism to be a mereological theory according to which perceptual experiences would seem to require tops, bottoms and weights in addition to beginnings, endings and durations (Martin, 2009a, 2009b). One benefit of my definition, I think, is that it is consistent with both 'engulfment-type' theories like Martin's and intentional theories not requiring mereological analyses. Furthermore, while it does not explicitly require 'directness'

Since common sense is thought to take perception not to require such intermediaries as sense-data (Austin, 1962), naïve realism is considered a species of direct realism and, as such, a foe of phenomenalism and indirect realism, views according to which physical objects are either ‘constructed out of’ or inferred from sense-data, sensory states, or some other sort of non-physical items. One mid-20th Century champion of common-sense realism, Everett Hall, put the naïve theory this way: we must not infer from the ‘undeniable commonsensible fact that we perceive tables and chairs out in the room, not in our heads’ that there is some sort of ‘law of projection’ at work, somehow launching our interior ideas or images out into the world. When looking at a sheet of paper in front of him, the naïve realist will simply make ‘the bold assumption that the only thing possessing the congeries of properties [we perceive] is the sheet of paper [rather than] look into our brains for them, or invent some unobservable mental events that display them’ (Hall, 1959: 81). I think it is safe to say, then, that naïve-realism, like the disjunctivism that claims to be allied with it, is hostile to any theory according to which the perception of green doors generally requires the perception or other epistemic apprehension of any non-physical particulars. I hope to show, however, that the two views are mismatched in spite of this shared animosity.

From the time of Reid until the flowering of adverbialism in the mid-1950s, direct realist forces—including those troops relying almost exclusively on common sense and ordinary language for their arguments—had difficulty explaining hallucinatory or dream events. This is because, unlike ordinary errors or distorting illusions, when dreams or hallucinations of green doors are in play, there may not be anything in the vicinity of the ersatz perceptual experience even to *look green*.⁹

This is where both adverbialism and disjunctivism came to the rescue. S’s perceptual experience may have no object whatever, yet remain sufficient for him to be truly said to have some such property as *being appeared to green doorly*. Similarly, it being merely to S as if he were seeing a green door does not (at least explicitly) require anything (green or not) to be present to anyone for S to be in such a perceptual state. So both techniques seemed to handle what might be called ‘the problem of the unavailable particular.’¹⁰ The crucial difference between the adverbial and disjunctive doctrines is that the latter does not allow even that there need be some epistemic state of the (ostensible) perceiver that obtains both when someone sees a green door and when he merely thinks he does.¹¹ That is, while the two schools agree that there need be nothing that even looks green when S has a hallucination of a green door, the adverbial theory suggests that S will at least be in the identical perceptual state (where this is construed as a psychological or epistemic rather than neural condition) when he sees a green door and

of perception (more on this later), the definition’s externality and independence criteria would seem to make other suppositions more difficult to support.

⁹Dawes Hicks, 1924 offers one example of a pre-adverbial attempt to deal with hallucinatory experiences without recourse to sense-data. Alston (1990, 1999) is an attempt at a revival of a pre-adverbial ‘theory of appearing.’ I would classify Alston’s position as a type of naïve realism, but one which, by seeming to ‘particularize’ content, handles hallucinations quite awkwardly—just as Dawes Hicks’ earlier attempts did. For a good discussion of how the inference to sensa requires a misunderstanding of nature of intentionality, see Harman, 1990.

¹⁰Another approach to this problem has been to interpret perceptions largely in terms of the apprehension or (mis)attribution of universals. So, for example, it was held by Hall (1961: 29–37), that when a green door is either seen or hallucinated, various physical properties are taken as being exemplified. When it is a hallucinatory experience these properties aren’t really exemplified, but only ‘objectively present’ or ‘ascribed’. For a discussion of Hall’s views on perception, see Horn, 2010.

¹¹The term ‘epistemic’ is included here because the disjunctivist need not assert that there may be no brain or other physical state regularly, or even *always* common to S’s two experiences. She can concede that, being a scientific matter, claims regarding the existence of those sorts of common elements are outside the scope of philosophy proper. What the disjunctivist denies is that there is any common perceivable (or ‘apprehendable’).

when he hallucinates/dreams/misperceives one. Disjunctivism thus goes a step further than adverbialism: by its lights, neither a green door, a possibly non-green other perceptual object, nor even a shared sensory state may be inferred from the existence of a hallucinatory occurrence—at least without the intervention of science. Put another way, for the Chisholmian, not only can both ‘I am seeing a green door’ and ‘I am appeared to green doorly’ be truly asserted by the same person at the same time, the being-appeared-to conjunct *must* obtain if the seeing conjunct is to do so (at least in that sense of ‘seeing a green door’ which requires the perceptual object to actually look like a green door). The experience that one enjoys when perceiving is thus being claimed to be in some sense identical in kind to what can occur when one is not. For the disjunctivist, of course, the mutual exclusivity of the veridical and merely ostensible disjuncts is taken to imply the impossibility of someone being in any psychologico-epistemic condition that is necessary to both the perceiving and non-perceiving states.

This purported advantage over adverbialism may seem like a solution in search of a problem if we consider the elimination of sense-data and the associated problem of the unavailable particular the only *desiderata* for the disjunctivist. In fact, however, there were other problems in the air when Hinton first wrote on this subject. These included several philosophical problems surrounding the meaning of sensation words that adverbialism not only seemed ill-equipped to address, but to which that theory seemed particularly vulnerable. This clue to disjunctivism’s origin is more easily discerned if we consider the fact that the theory was developed at Oxford at a time when that school was very much under the spell of (the later) Wittgenstein. As is well known, for the Wittgenstein of the *Investigations*, the notion that ordinary judgments about the world—perceptual or otherwise—are synthesized from private mental states is as absurd and pernicious as any philosophical idea ever could be. Not only did Wittgenstein deride the idea of perceptual words having non-public origins, he also heaped scorn on the notion of any but nominal essences tying together classes of propositional attitudes. Since the adverbialists claimed that seeing a green door requires the obtaining of at least one of some particular class of mental states denoted by phrases like ‘being appeared to green doorly,’ a Wittgensteinian can be expected to demur based on the tenet that even if any such strange properties exist, neither any single example nor any particular group of them can be necessarily involved in the perception of a green door. On this view, seeing green doors involves a ‘game’ with rules as infinitely malleable as those involving *being honorable* or *acting silly*. We can, perhaps, capture all of some ‘type’ of perceptual experience under some phrase via stipulation, but there will be no ‘real essence’ referred to by general terms of that sort (Wittgenstein, 1953).

It can thus be seen why mid-20th Century Oxonians sought to toss such alleged properties as *being appeared to greenly* into the same dustpan into which green sense-data had earlier been thrown: neither batch of purported entities was thought to be of any use in the (to them, absurd) task of ‘getting us to’ physical objects. On their view, inferences to the external world neither are nor can be made from ‘sensory states’ any more than they are or could be made from sense-data. The Cartesian hope of getting from certainties within us to a physical world outside us, whether manifested by indirect realism or phenomenalism, was declared to be as false as the prior Anselmian hope of getting from a concept to a deity. But the Oxonians brought good news too: they offered a novel way to support the old direct realist claim that no inferences from inner states to outer things were ever needed in the first place, the claim that green doors are available to us directly.

If we climb the ladder of semantic ascent, we will be able to see how this new support was constructed. The Wittgensteinian argument (Wittgenstein, 1953: §293 and *passim*) involved several related contentions, at least one being clearly empirical: the claim that acquisition of

perception-related ‘mental words’ involves a prior understanding of words for public perceivables (like green doors).¹² The assertion that descriptions of sensory states as well as those of sense-data are entirely ‘parasitic’ upon descriptions of physical objects was thought to be fatal to both phenomenalism and indirect realism, since it was believed that the order (in the senses both of classification and chronology) of being must parallel the order of understanding. This diagnosis of parasitism was sometimes thought to have been achievable by conceptual analysis—discovered solely through contemplation of the meaning (or uses) of phrases like ‘green afterimage’ and ‘green door, and was sometimes held to follow from the truth of the empirical claim regarding language acquisition already alluded to. In either case, a linguistic argument had now come to the fore in the argument for directness.¹³

This perspective was not limited to Oxford. Wittgensteinian empirico-conceptual theses regarding the connection of language and perception were among the central tenets of some of the most important Anglo-American philosophers of the 20th Century. I here provide three examples—only one by an Oxford philosopher. First, here is Wilfrid Sellars:

[T]he concept of *looking green*, the ability to recognize that something *looks green*, presupposes the concept of *being green*, and... the latter concept involves the ability to tell what colors objects have by looking at them – which, in turn, involves knowing in what circumstances to place an object if one wishes to ascertain its color by looking at it.

(Sellars, 1956: 274). W. V. O. Quine urged the following on the opening pages of *Word and Object*:

Linguistically, and hence conceptually, the things in sharpest focus are the things that are public enough to be talked of publicly, common and conspicuous enough to be talked of often, and near enough to sense to be quickly identified and learned by name; it is to these that words apply first and foremost. Talk of subjective sense qualities come mainly as a derivative idiom... [I]mmmediate experience simply will not, of itself, cohere as an autonomous domain. References to physical things are largely what hold it together. These references are not just inessential vestiges of the initially intersubjective character of language, capable of being weeded out by devising an artificially subjective language for sense data. Rather they give us our main continuing access to past sense data themselves...

(Quine, 1960: 1–2). Similarly, Strawson (1979: 43–4) claimed that any account of sensible experience which attempts to eliminate commitments to physical objects in favor of observers’ ‘subjective episodes’ would nevertheless...

embody or reflect a certain view of the world, as containing objects, variously propertied, located in a common space and continuing in their existence independently of our interrupted and relatively fleeting perceptions of them. Our making of such judgments implies our possession and application of concepts of such objects... [O]ur sensible experience itself is thoroughly permeated with those concepts of objects which figure in such judgments.

All three of these philosophers, in spite of their diverse positions on many issues, can thus be seen to agree on the Wittgensteinian thesis that the entire world of mental entities—whether

¹²There was no epistemic circularity involved in this assertion, since the words for publicly available items (like ‘green’ or ‘door’) were taken *not* to require any prior understanding of private, ‘mentalese’ terms.

¹³It should not be taken from this or what follows that I do not consider G.E. Moore’s earlier paradigm case argument for common sense also to have been an important precursor of the disjunctivist defense of direct realism. And, of course, that argument also has a linguistic form.

considered as objects, contents, qualia, or acts—is describable only in a kind of pidgin physical object language.¹⁴ Hinton and the other early disjunctivists may thus be seen as creators of a shorthand statement of the Wittgensteinian argument that progresses from premises regarding:

- (i) the denial that real essences tie terms for various ‘kinds’ of perceptual experiences together; and
- (ii) the necessity of the intersubjectivity of primary linguistic referents to the acquisition of any natural language

to a conclusion according to which even adverbialism yields too much to the forces of phenomenalism and indirect realism. As hallucinations are the derivative (or ‘parasitic’) items here, there can be nothing ‘within’ them which is not only found in veridical perceptual experiences as well, but whose apprehension is necessary for the latter experiences to occur.

With this linguistic argument added to the anti-sensa arsenal, we may, I think, characterize the main features of the current dispute over disjunctivism as follows: On one side much is made of: (i) powerful intuitions regarding the existence and ‘incorrigibility’ of a certain type of perceptual qualia—whether viewed as states, contents or objects—that are extremely hard to ignore or dismiss; (ii) the indisputable fact that most of us have been taken in by illusions or dreams at one time or another; and (iii) the reasonableness of an expectation that if the important proximate causes (the neurological conditions) of two perceptual events have identical characteristics, the effects will be identical in all important respects as well (Broad, 1914; Robinson, 1994: 151–62). On the other side we find: (i) a claimed consistency with common sense and ordinary language; (ii) an Occamist desire to avoid a category of entities that it is argued a correct theory of the world is better off without (especially where their main support is said to be Hume’s fallacious argument from perceptual relativity); and (iii) a hypothesis regarding the derivative meaning of ‘mental words,’ backed by empirical claims regarding the acquisition of such words.

Although disjunctivism wasn’t formally proposed until the late 1960s, if the above historical gloss is correct, the basic linguistic features of the quarrel between direct realists and their adversaries has not changed much since the publication of *Philosophical Investigations* or even, perhaps, since the circulation of the *Blue Book*. That being the case, is there no hope of any progress at this late date? I believe the answer here is ‘No and Yes.’ With respect to the main issue of the philosophy of perception, it is my view that there is unlikely to be anything resembling a conclusive resolution of any such basic ‘categorical’ dispute as that which has persisted for hundreds of years between the supporters of direct realism on one side and the supporters of phenomenalism and indirectness on the other. Certainly, direct realists have by this point made quite plain that, no matter what erroneous, dream, or psychedelic experience they are presented with, they will deny that it requires the existence of any non-physical entities, items whose apprehension on other occasions make it possible for us to veridically perceive such things as green doors. And the foes of directness have been similarly immovable. As with most age-old philosophical issues, further multiplication of cases here is unlikely to be of much use, in my opinion.¹⁵

¹⁴For the classic statement of this view, see, generally, Wittgenstein (1953), especially Part II. It has been suggested by Glock, (2003: 21) that Quine’s views on this matter were actually derived entirely from Skinner. For a discussion of the similarities of a number of Skinnerian and Wittgensteinian views regarding language acquisition, see Day (1969).

¹⁵For a contrasting view, one according to which—in spite of hundreds of years of non-dispositive sparring—direct realism may by ‘conclusive argument’ finally be laid to rest and indirect realism crowned the final victor, see Coates. (2007: 62–98) and Fumerton (2006). For the contrary claim, that direct realism may be definitively demonstrated, see Armstrong (1961).

But with respect to the more limited disjunctivist assertion regarding the mutually exclusive natures of veridical and non-veridical perceptual experiences, the situation may not be quite so dire. Because disjunctivism occupies only the forward-most position in the dispute over the directness of perception, and because it relies on its close ties to naïve realism (Martin, 2009b; Snowdon, 1992; Campbell: 2002) it seems to me to leave open a legitimate chance of its own refutation. Surely, if one of the main supports of disjunctivism is its claimed consonance with our every-day picture of the world, a showing of inconsistency between the two viewpoints must at least be a serious blow. I believe, in any case, that it can be demonstrated that there are perfectly ordinary situations in which naïve realism is committed to common factors of a type that are antithetical to disjunctivism, and, there being so little else to support the doctrine, I think this inconsistency with common sense makes quite clear that disjunctivism can no longer be considered a serious contender in the philosophy of perception. The structure of my approach, however, is such that even if all of its claimed consequences are correctly drawn, it will not enable us to infer either that disjunctivism is certainly false or that the Wittgensteinian claims regarding the derivativeness of ‘mentalese’ or the implausibility of essentialism are inaccurate. We can get no further than the conclusion that if the linguistic premises are correct, either some additional premise was inserted by the disjunctivist or their inference to ‘no common factors’ is invalid. Certainly, the linguistic tenets alone seem obviously consistent with naïve realism.¹⁶ This result it seems to me, is sufficient to allege that disjunctivism has fallen or should fall from any remaining philosophical grace.

I have claimed that disjunctivism is inconsistent with naïve realism and have defined the latter viewpoint, but I have not as yet attempted a formal definition of ‘disjunctivism.’ As I indicated above, simply repeating that one of the *perceiving/merely as if perceiving* disjuncts must always be false is not terribly helpful, since (given our understanding of ‘merely’) that fact would seem to be consistent with every theory of perception. We might, then, try to define the position by referring to the prohibition of required common factors between veridical and non-veridical perceptions. As we take this tack, we should remember that when critics have suggested such factors as neurological states or the property of *being indistinguishable by S from the state of affairs expressed by the other disjunct* as possible counter-examples, adherents of disjunctivism have been unmoved. They have simply responded with something like, ‘Those aren’t the kind of common factors that are dangerous to our theory’ (Putnam, 1999). Clearly, then, our definition must indicate just what sorts of states of affairs *are* the dangerous ones, the ones whose existence could make the theory false.

The key here is first to recall the original *desideratum* of disjunctivism: dispensing not only with sense-data, but with sensory states or any other items claimed both to be epistemically (rather than only causally) required for the perception of some physical object, and also to be distinct from that object or any part of it. That is, the view was to be an example of a direct realist position that denies that there are any items E such that, in order for any physical object O to be perceived by a perceiver S at t, E would itself/themselves have to be perceived or otherwise apprehended by S at t, in spite of being neither individually nor jointly identical to O or any part of O. Such Es are the dangerous items, then, the entities the proof or discovery of which would be fatal to the position. So, when constructing our definition, we must remember that the distinctive feature of disjunctivism is not its (quite mainstream) disapproval of *sensa*, but its no-common-factor claim. That was Hinton’s great contribution, the advance he made

¹⁶It may be instructive to consider that neither Sellars, Quine, nor Strawson took their common perspective on the derivativeness of mental terms to imply a no-common-factor theory of perception.

upon all his predecessors.¹⁷ Thus, when we say that disjunctivism is a type of perceptual realism that will be false if there are ‘dangerous entities’ of the type explained above, we cannot restrict our antipathy to mental items; it is a view according to which there may be no required entity of *any type* which is ‘relevantly common’ to both actual and merely ostensible perceptual experiences as of the same physical object. But what is *relevant commonality*? I think it is this:

An entity (or process) E is *relevantly common* both to some perceiver S’s actual perception of some (intentional) object O and to his merely ostensible perceptual experience as of O = *df.* E is such that both (i) it is only in virtue of S’s perceiving or otherwise apprehending E that S actually perceives O; and (ii) S’s perceiving or otherwise apprehending E is sufficient for S to be in a condition that is merely to him as if he were perceiving O.¹⁸

The use of *sufficiency* in the second disjunct illustrates a remark made earlier, that the uses of ‘perception’ and ‘apprehension’ are intended to be quite minimalistic and broad: no advanced cognition is required for perceptual ‘takings’ as here understood. Apprehension of no more than the minimum deemed necessary for ‘ostensible perception’ is taken to be sufficient to make the second disjunct true. Such a tack allows for the only “difference” between the two experiences to be *veridicality*. If more than simple apprehension of E—some cognitive or attitudinal extra—were required to produce veridicality, the two disjunctive experiences might be internally distinguishable.

With this characterization in hand we can define ‘disjunctivism’ in such a way that we may actually be able to test its truth in various perceptual situations.

Disjunctivism = *df.* A species of direct realism according to which for all ostensible perceptual experiences by S of O, there is no entity (or process) that is relevantly common to both (i) S’s (actually) perceiving O and (ii) it merely being to S as if he were perceiving O.¹⁹

It is worth noting that neither *causality* nor *indistinguishability* seems to create any difficulty here. The definitions do not rule out the existence of one or more neurological states that might be common to the seeing of a green door and the hallucinating of one, since such states, not being apprehended, are not epistemically relevant. However important optic nerves might be to vision, we don’t actually perceive them when we see something. Similarly, such properties as *being indistinguishable by S from the psychological state S is in when he is actually perceiving O* will not be relevantly common even if such properties are of necessity exemplified in illusory as well as veridical perceptual experiences. Again, while (correctly) perceiving my front door as purple and mis-perceiving it as blue may both require the existence and seeing of my door, such common element is neither necessary nor sufficient for any merely ostensible perceptual experiences of it as being one color or the other.

¹⁷Unless Husserl actually preceded Hinton in this matter (Smith, 2008). I am not competent to judge that claim.

¹⁸The ‘merely’ again indicates that S’s perceptual experience is not veridical. It may be noted by some readers that I make no attempt to distinguish between hallucinations and non-hallucinatory illusions here, even though, for example, (correctly) perceiving my front door as purple and mis-perceiving it as blue may both require the existence and apprehension of my door. It is my view that the important dichotomy here is between veridical and merely ostensible. Since having the ‘right object’ available for perception is neither necessary nor sufficient to ‘as if’ experiences according to the disjunctivist, such objects cannot be accounted ‘relevantly common’—in spite of the importance of their apprehension to the truth value of the first disjunct.

¹⁹Although disjunctivists have sometimes talked as though perception and hallucination involve two fundamentally antithetical and necessarily non-interacting worlds, in the spirit of charity, I will take the above definition to make only the most narrow interdiction: at any given time t, there can be nothing relevantly common between (i) S’s having a veridical perceptual experience as of O at t, and (ii) S’s only seeming to have such a perception at t.

It can be seen that the above definition of ‘disjunctivism’ includes a denial of the necessity of ‘relevant commonalities’ whatever their claimed ontological status, rather than simply denying the existence of sense-data or other mental items to which we are believed by some to have special perceptual access. It thus allows disjunctivists to plausibly deny that their theory is no more than a restatement of antipathy to sense-data and sensation-apprehension. That is, the definition has the virtue of allowing the possibility for the theory to make a legitimate contribution to the philosophy of perception, by going beyond all of its anti-sensa predecessors. I believe, in sum, that the disjunctivist has no grounds for complaint against this definition. With its use, however, I think it can be shown that disjunctivism cannot be true if naïve realism is.

It has been noted by both disjunctivists and non-disjunctivists alike (Alston, 1999; Martin, 2006; Brewer, 2008) that not all non-veridical perceptual experiences involve hallucinations or (we may devoutly hope) evil demons, realistic dreams, or the machinations of neuro-scientists, mad or otherwise. It may well be, in fact, that relatively few of them do. Let us, therefore, see how disjunctivism, as defined above, handles the following case, which, like Grice’s well-known example of the reflected pillar (Grice, 1961; see also Tye, 2007), involves both vision and a mirror, but is simpler and more commonplace, since it does not require a Gettier-type defeasor. Suppose that someone (‘S’) is in a restaurant he has never been in before and, while waiting to order (time t_1), thinks he sees a waitress walk by in a room in front of him. What he is actually seeing, however, is an extremely life-like reflection of this waitress on the mirrored wall before him: she is really walking directly behind S.

Let us first describe this (I hope not terribly artificial) case disjunctively.

- (1) S is either seeing the waitress walk in front of him or it is merely to S as if he were seeing the waitress walk in front of him.²⁰

As we are concerned with the naïve realist take on this situation, let us next consider what a typical member of this clan (I’ll call him ‘Wesley’) might say about these disjuncts after having S’s dining experience described to him. Presumably we can expect Wesley to respond with something like this: ‘Since the waitress is actually behind S, the first disjunct must be false, which would make the second one true.’ As we have seen, this isn’t too helpful, the key matter really being whether there are relevantly common factors at work here—but let us defer that question for the moment while we consider a subsequent perceptual experience S enjoys along with his meal.

Suppose that by the time dessert is served, a time (t_2) by which S has come to realize that there is a mirror in front of him, he sees a reflection of the same waitress making another pass, and let us suppose that this second reflection is exactly similar to the one he observed when he first sat down. This time, however, because of his new understanding of the restaurant’s decorative scheme, what S enjoys is a perceptual experience as of the waitress walking behind him. The disjunctive restatement thus now yields:

- (2) S is either seeing the waitress walk behind him or it is merely to S as if he were seeing the waitress walk behind him.

²⁰While it may seem odd to utilize neither an illusion nor a hallucination in this example, we should remember that what is important for our purposes is the hunt for common epistemic factors as between veridical and merely ostensible perception, not the particular manner in which the events in the second disjunct are classified. While there may be important differences between the predicaments faced by brains in vats, dreamers, LSD partakers, jaundice sufferers, hall-of-mirror visitors, evil demon victims, etc., the consistent disjunctivist must keep her eye on the prize—a denial of the necessary interposition of epistemically relevant common factors between accurate perceptions and merely ‘as if’ ones. Obviously, there is a continuum of types perceptual error, whether involving drugs, demons or reflective devices, and disjunctivism should be expected to handle all of them.

What would Wesley say about the truth values of the disjuncts in this case? Obviously, naïve realists cannot generally take the position that mirrors, windows, lenses, screens, fog, etc., prevent perception of physical objects from taking place: intervening media are regular facts of our perceptual lives. For philosophical proponents of common sense like Wesley, it is not the imposition of the mirror, but only S's ignorance of its placement in front of him that prevented him from seeing that the waitress was walking behind him at t1. In fact, most realists of any stripe would agree that S was already seeing the waitress *simpliciter* at that time; he was simply mistaken about her location with respect to his table. Thomas Reid, among the wariest opponents of claims regarding indirect perception in the history of philosophy, conceded that 'even a child gets the better of [the deception produced by mirror images] and knows that he sees himself only,' and added that, for those who understand optics, mirrors 'give just and true information' (Reid, 1785: I, i and II, xxii). Presumably, Wesley will join with Reid on this matter, taking the first disjunct to be true, and the second to be false, since the latter requires the non-veridicality of S's perceptual experience.²¹

I have postponed the central questions for Wesley here, those involving the existence of epistemically relevant common factors, because of a complexity involved in my example that I believe is better off avoided. Given the exact similarity stipulated to hold between the reflected images exploited by S at t1 and t2, a critic of the disjunctive paraphrases given above might deride the fact that they seem to imply that at t1, S has an experience as of the waitress walking in front of him that is indistinguishable from his actually seeing the waitress walk behind him at t2. I believe the disjunctivist would respond to any such imputation of oddness in something like the following manner: 'Of course it is not the case that it being to S as if the waitress is walking in front of him and it being to S as if the waitress is walking behind him are indistinguishable experiences! They are palpably different, and, in fact, this confused complaint does not even really depend in any important way on knowledge of mirror placement. For example, the scenario would work as well if S came to understand, not where the mirrors are, but the concept of *being behind* between his two viewings.' This disjunctivist might conclude by reminding us that, on her view, background knowledge—what perceivers believe and understand—is far from irrelevant to the perceptual process. And as we have seen, the position seems to have been created partly to reflect various insights expressed by a philosopher who was extremely sensitive to issues surrounding the concept of *seeing as* (Wittgenstein, 1953: Part II).

This is, no doubt, an interesting topic, but I believe it can be avoided for our present purposes. To escape these complexities, we must simply sift out the 'seen as' (or attributional) portion of S's experiences both at t1 and t2, and concentrate on his perception (or non-perception) of the waitress *simpliciter*, that is, without concern to anything he happens to perceive about her (Dretske, 1969). In a word, does S see her or doesn't he? Adopting this stripped down approach will also simplify consideration of what the naïve realist may be expected to say about S's experiences at t1 and t2, not of the waitress herself, but of her reflected images—for those, too, would seem to be ostensible objects of external perception.

Removing any aspect of (2) that involves attribution of the waitress's position relative to S, we get

(3) S is either seeing the waitress or it is merely to S as if he were seeing the waitress.

²¹On a stricter and less common-sense oriented view, one according to which a veridical perception of some object O can never depend on the aid of an intervening reflection, the truth-values of the disjuncts would, of course, be reversed.

Again, (3) is undeniable. But deciding which disjunct will be considered true and which false at each of the two times in question is a little trickier. As noted above, for common sense advocates like Reid, our knowledge of how mirrors work allows for the possibility of their involvement in veridical perceptions of what they reflect, at least in favorable situations. It may be, however, that while some naive realists (including Wesley) will hold that S therefore sees the waitress at t1, others (like Wesley's sister, Eve) may claim that veridical perception involving mirroring cannot occur without awareness of the interposition of any mirrors in play at the time. For the latitudinarian innocent like Wesley, then, the first disjunct of (3) will be true and the second false. For stricter naïfs like Eve, these truth values will be reversed. Presumably, at t2, both siblings will agree that the first disjunct is true and the second false.²²

Let us now consider what may be said about S's perceptual relation, not to the waitress, but to the mirror images he either knowingly or unknowingly uses to be in a perceptual situation as of seeing his waitress (whether he's thought to really see her or not).

(4) S is either seeing the mirror images of his waitress or it is merely to S as if he were seeing them.

What will Wesley and Eve say about S's perceptual experience at t1? Does S, because of his ignorance of the mirror, fail to perceive these images or does he successfully perceive them without realizing it? Let us suppose that Wesley takes the position that S *does* see the mirror images, that the first disjunct is true and the second false. Eve, however, insists that, because of S's ignorance of what's going on around him, he is not really perceiving either the waitress or her reflection—though she likely will not deny that S is *somehow* apprehending these images. On Eve's view, then, both disjuncts of (4) are false at t1 because she takes it to be incorrect to say that S is enjoying a perceptual experience as of the reflections in the first place. On her view, S is not strictly in a perceptual situation with respect to the mirror images at all at t1, though he *is* in a non-veridical one with respect to the waitress.

At t2, the results can be expected to be different: both siblings will agree that the first disjunct of (4) is true and the second false. Since Eve's (perhaps unorthodox) view regarding 'perceiving unawares,' is no longer relevant once S understands the lay of the land, there will be no obvious realist account according to which S should not even be described as having an ostensible perception of the reflection.

I hope it is becoming clear that the responses of Wesley and Eve to the either-or statements presented to them are a prelude to a crucial failure of the disjunctivist approach—at least from the siblings' common-sense vantage points. Let's review. According to Wesley, at both t1 and t2, S sees both the waitress and her reflected images.²³ Eve agrees with Wesley about what is happening at t2 (S sees both the waitress and her reflection), but insists that at t1 S doesn't really perceive either the waitress or her reflection. Eve's take is that at the earlier time S merely had a perceptual experience as of the waitress being in front of him, and had no perceptual experience as of the reflections. She would not, presumably, insist that S has no epistemic relationship with the images whatever at t1, for if S did not apprehend them in *some* fashion at that time, his ability to recognize that, for example, the waitress is wearing the same clothes at t2 that she was wearing earlier, would be quite difficult to explain.

²²As noted above, there may be even stricter theorists who would balk at the first disjunct even at t2, whether or not S knows of the mirrored wall at that time.

²³We should not infer from this that Wesley's latitudinarian instincts result in him thinking that S was never wrong about the waitress or her reflection that night, however. Remember, he has already said that he believes that S had a non-veridical perceptual experience as of the waitress being in front of him at t1.

We are now ready to ask our prototypical naïve realists the key question: Is apprehension (whether by perceiving or in some other manner) of the reflected images of the waitress necessary both to S's seeing her (at those times at which they believe S does in fact see her) and to it being merely to him as if he were seeing her? Wesley and Eve will certainly both respond in the affirmative. As to the veridical disjunct, how else but with such images as those used by S could one with eyes in the front of his head see someone behind him? And, with respect to the 'merely as if' disjunct, all realists can be expected to hold that in order to be confounded by a mirror image, one must somehow 'take it in.' Surely, if one utilizes these mirror images in the way S does (in the aid of veridical perception or error, as the case may be), one must be apprehending them somehow: there cannot just be a causal relationship at work. The siblings may not agree about whether it is strictly true at each time that S *sees* the images, but they will certainly agree that he must have *some* kind of epistemic access to them without which he couldn't see the waitress at either time. For again, one thing common sense is absolutely clear about is that people may sometimes be aided in perception of physical objects by the interposition of undistorted mirror images (which is why periscopes are sometimes useful on golf courses, and automobiles are equipped the way they are), and, unlike, say, corrective lenses or ambient light, the reflected images are *cognitively available*. And their apprehension is sufficient to produce (indeed *is*) an ostensible perceptual experience.

Taking the single case of S's seeing or merely seeming to see the waitress at t1, it is clear that whether we believe that he sees her or is rather in the throes of an error-producing illusion at that time, S's apprehension of the self-same items (reflected images of the waitress) are required. This is inconsistent with disjunctivism as we have defined it. And, as indicated above, I don't think the definition can be altered in a manner that would eliminate this problem without either its failure to correctly represent the views of its supporters or its degeneration into a simple and old-fashioned insistence that sense-data (and affiliated) theories are false.

That mirror images are relevantly common to certain veridical and non-veridical perceptual experiences will likely give comfort to sense-data supporters, in spite of the physicality of mirrors and their reflections. 'Why,' they may ask, 'if mirror images may be both required and relevantly common to certain veridical perceptions and illusions, could not other things be so as well? As there are cases of indirect perception in our every-day lives, can anything ensure that there will be no circumstances in which we (perhaps unwittingly) use the sort of *mental* common factors that *all* direct realists object to? Of course, it is open to the direct realist to simply continue to deny the existence of any perceived, perceivable, or otherwise epistemically accessible non-physical entities in the perception of physical objects, in spite of examples involving mirrors, just as he formerly did when proffered examples involving dreams and hallucinations. Certainly, direct realism can be defined in such a manner that its truth or falsity will not depend on the fate of disjunctivism.

But where, exactly, has the disjunctivist gone wrong here? Why have her appeals to common sense and Wittgensteinian tenets regarding language acquisition not settled this matter in her favor? The problem, I believe, is that the disjunctivist has put upon these linguistic premises a burden other than that which they are designed to support. As nothing prevents language from being learned by children brought up in a hall of mirrors (or Platonic cave), it cannot be *indirectness* that must be proscribed according to the Wittgensteinian argument: it can only be *privacy/internality*. But disjunctivism is patently a promise of directness. The theory's proponents may lean on claims about how we learn observation sentences and mental predicates, but those claims are extraneous to its central doctrine, which is the categorical denial of indirectness in perception, based on the no-relevant-common-factor proposition.

It is also worth pointing out that no truly 'naïve' theory ought to have ever been expected to take an unequivocal position on what must always be true in perceptual experience in the first place. A common sense approach is unlikely to make any lead pipe guarantees of directness (whether or not as a result of some sort of claimed 'engulfment' of external objects by our perceptual experiences)²⁴ and should not be depended upon to do so by any more formal doctrine.

But if disjunctivism has been discredited, where does that leave direct realism? As indicated above, the non-disjunctive direct realist may decide to countenance relevantly common factors even between perceptions of green doors and hallucinations of them, so long as those factors are not non-physical items. Situations like those occurring at S's dinner may force a direct realist to concede that ordinary perception is not always direct, but as mirror images are physical, scientifically measurable items, it is open to him to consistently deny such ghostly stuff as sense-data and apprehended sensations, either through the use of adverbialism, the apprehension of universals, or through some other non-disjunctivist theory.

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²⁴ '[T]he actual objects of perception, the external things such as trees tables and rainbows. . . partly constitute one's conscious experience, and hence determine the phenomenal character of one's experiences.' And, he admonishes, 'This talk of constitution and determination should be taken literally' (Martin (b), 2009: 93).

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